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Gold Plume, OR, BUFFALO BILL,

The Boy Bandit;

The Pony Express Rider.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



BUFFALO BILL LEANED FAR FORWARD, REVOLVER IN HAND AND LEVELED IT IN THE FACE OF THE BOY BANDIT.

A Romance of Buffalo Bill's Early Life.

Gold Plume, THE BOY BANDIT; OR, THE KID-GLOVE SPORT.

A Sequel to "Little Grit, the Wild Rider."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE HUSSAR CAPTAIN," "THE
SEA DEVIL," "DICK DEAD-EYE," "THE
BOY DUELIST," "LITTLE GRIT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WEIRD VISITOR.

"Bah! I am a fool to feel a presentiment of evil now, just as I have a fortune in my grasp, have purchased back the old homestead, and can give my child an inheritance of which she may be proud; but, why can I not drive the phantoms of evil to come from before my eyes, and keep this chill of almost despair out of my heart?"

"No, no, I cannot, for the old feeling comes back to me, and I tremble with dread, just as I am about to step across the threshold of a new life."

The speaker was Daniel Benton, a stock-tender on the line of the Overland Pony Express, and a man of fine physique and striking face, seemingly out of place in that wild locality.

Those who read "Little Grit, the Wild Rider," will recognize in Dan Benton an old acquaintance, who dwelt with his pretty daughter, Bessie, in a snug little cabin, far from other habitation of men, and both father and child seemingly content in that home among the mountains.

Love for an erring brother had cost him the fortune of his earlier years, and destitute, he had sought an abiding place among the western wilds as stock-tender to the Pony Express Company, to the outward eye his only occupation, though secretly he passed his time, between the arrivals and departures of the riders, in digging gold in a secluded canyon, unknown even to his daughter.

Locked up in his heart he held the secret, and toiled on and on, until at last he had quietly bought back the home of his boyhood and other property he had sacrificed for his brother, and yet had hidden away a large sum in gold dust, while his mine continued to yield generously.

But there were enemies who kept an eye upon him, and by accident his secret had become known to Gold Plume, the Boy Bandit, though the location of his mine could not be found, and efforts were made to force from the mining stock-tender his riches, and refusing to give up his hard earnings, he had been swung up to a beam in his cabin and left for dead, while his beautiful daughter, Bessie, would have shared the same fate, had it not been for the coming of Little Grit, the Wild Rider, who rescued Benton from death, and was the means of restoring to him his child, who had been the captive of the outlaws.

With threats of death before him, Dan Benton had determined to give up his mine, and with the treasure he had received, go on to Rocky Glen, and, accompanied by his daughter, and the Wild Rider, to bid farewell forever to the land of the West.

With her lover, Little Grit, Bessie had gone on to the tavern at Rocky Glen, leaving her father to follow after nightfall, with the treasure, which he would not take from its hiding-place until darkness fell upon the scene.

Calmly he had packed his few traps together, and was waiting the coming of night, when a foreboding of evil caused him to utter the words that open this story.

Going to the door of his cabin, he looked out upon the sunlit valley, hoping that the feeling of coming evil would go from him; but it yet remained, as strong as ever, strive as he might

to shake it off, and he sat down in gloomy meditation, and again mused:

"Well, if this feeling means harm to me I am content, for it is Bessie's happiness only I want."

"That strange, and yet noble youth, whom men call Little Grit, will make her a good husband, and he knows where I have the gold buried, and—"

He paused, for there came the sound of a foot-fall without the cabin, and a shadow fell upon the doorway.

Quickly the stock-tender arose to his feet, for, excepting the Pony Riders, and an occasional hunter, few persons ever came to his lonely house.

"Great God!"

The cry seemed wrung from his lips by some startling apparition, and he gazed fixedly at the door with staring eyes.

And no wonder! for, like a picture in a frame, stood a form in the doorway, a woman's form, clad in pure white.

A loose, flowing robe of light material fell from her shoulders to her feet, and worn around her head, like a turban, and with long ends to serve as veils, was a snowy cloth, that gave to her darkly-bronzed face and large, lustrous eyes, a weird look.

"Are you of this earth?" whispered, rather than spoke the man, for his forebodings of evil had excited his mind into almost a belief in the supernatural.

"I am called the Spirit of the Canyon, Daniel Benton," was the clear response.

"Hah! you then are that weird, strange creature that I have seen flit along the trail at night, and who is said to be the ghost of a woman slain in the Haunted Canyon, years ago?" he asked in a suppressed voice.

"Yes, I am what I am, and, Daniel Benton, I have come for you."

"Oh God! I feared the blow would fall, and alas! it has fallen," and the stock-tender sunk down on his chair and buried his face in his hands, while in silence the weird-looking woman stood regarding him.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOLD SECRET.

FOR full a moment the tableau, of the sorrow-stricken man and his weird visitor, remained, and neither spoke a word; but then, with a mighty effort, the man aroused himself, and said:

"I was momentarily awed by your presence, but now I am myself again, and you will see no more weakness. Why have you come here?"

"I told you that I had come for you," was the reply.

"And who are you?"

"The Spirit of the Canyon."

"Bah! if I was weak enough a few minutes since to believe in the supernatural, I am not now. You are a woman, masquerading as a ghost, and I ask you what you want with me?"

"Your daughter."

"My daughter! In Heaven's name what do you want with her?" and the stock-tender turned slightly pale, for his child was the one idol of his worship.

"The Boy Bandit has sent for her."

"That accursed fiend has sent for my child?"

"You heard me."

"Well, thank God, she is beyond his reach. Go and tell him so."

"I cannot return empty-handed; you, or your daughter go with me," was the woman's firm response.

"I tell you my child is beyond the reach of harm."

"Then you must go with me."

"You are a fool, to think I will obey the summons of a woman," was the stock-tender's angry retort.

"I have power to force you to obey."

"I doubt it."

"Do you? Then look!" and the woman pointed to the open window behind the man.

Turning, he beheld with a start, that two men stood there, and upon him were leveled a couple of revolvers.

Again he looked back at the woman, and upon each side of her now stood a huge form, with a cruel, sinister face.

With a slight smile the woman said:

"You see, Daniel Benton, that I have you in my power; now will you give up your daughter, or go with me yourself?"

"I will never give her up."

"Then you must go, and I wish you to make known the hiding-place of your gold."

"Never! You shall not rob Bessie of that, if you do of her father."

"You refuse to make known the hiding-place."

"Yes, I do refuse."

"Your life shall be the forfeit of your refusal."

"So be it; in the grave there is rest."

"Give up your gold and the Boy Bandit will spare your life."

"I will not give up my gold; not one grain of dust shall that accursed wretch receive."

"Beware, for Gold Plume will kill you."

"I accept my fate."

"Then you have just ten minutes to live."

"Do you obey the orders of your chief?"

"I obey the orders of Gold Plume, the Boy Bandit."

"And he commands you to take my gold, or my life?"

"Yes, if you will not give up your daughter."

"Take my life then."

"I will; you have but ten minutes, I say, to live, and if you have aught to say, or to write, I grant you permission."

"I can ask no more," and taking pen, ink and paper from a drawer, Daniel Benton wrote a short letter to his daughter, and handed it to the woman, who took from her belt a piece of paper upon which was something written in a bold hand, and stuck the two upon the door of the cabin.

"What is on that paper?" asked the stock-tender.

"Simply a placard for the eyes of Little Grit, the Wild Rider. Now are you ready to die, Daniel Benton?"

"Yes, if I must die, it might as well be over with," he answered sadly.

"And you refuse to say where your gold is hidden?"

"I refuse, positively."

"If I promise you your life?"

"I still refuse."

"You are stubborn."

"I am just to my child."

"She knows then where the treasure is buried?"

"No, but there is one other that does."

"The Wild Rider?"

"It matters not."

"You will die rather than tell?"

"Yes."

"Seize that man and bind him!"

The woman spoke harshly, and four men rushed into the cabin, and Daniel Benton the stock-tender felt that the end of his life had come, and that his foreboding of evil was to be verified.

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUTH FROM KANSAS.

"THAR is goin' ter be music in ther round these heur diggins, pard, or I are howlin' liar."

The speaker was a thorough type of the uncouth borderman, yet in his fearless face there was a look of honesty and goodness that showed the heart within was in the right place.

An unfortunate man in his mining undertakings, he had taken to gambling, and was so universally successful in holding good hands that his name of Ned Ross had been dropped wholly, and his companions knew him only as "Trumps."

His remark that opens this chapter had been

addressed to no one in particular, but every one in general, for two score of men were in the saloon of the border inn, Rider's Rest, whose proprietor, Judge Hunter, was proud of it as a frontier public house.

It was growing toward nine o'clock, and teamsters, stablemen, miners, and the attaches of the Pony Express were dropping into the saloon to spend the time in gambling, drinking and gossiping, and the games had only been deferred on account of the exciting scenes of the past few days in Rocky Glen, for besides being the central head-quarters of the Pony Express Company, it had just been selected as the terminus of a line of overland coaches, and Colonel Hewlett, a well-known cavalry officer, had arrived there with a military train to establish a fort in the vicinity.

These circumstances, to add to the importance of Rocky Glen, were enough in themselves to create intense enthusiasm, but the theme of special importance, just then, was the fact that Colonel Hewlett's lovely daughter, Helen, had been kidnapped from the train, by two outlaws disguised as hunters, and had been rescued by Little Grit, the Wild Rider of the Pony Express, who had also performed prodigies of valor against the bandits, who, under their boy leader, Gold Plume, had been committing depredations along the line, and setting both the Vigilantes and military at defiance.

A few hours before we find the crowd congregating in the "Rider's Free-and-Easy"—as the tavern was called—the new Pony Rider, who was to take the place of Little Grit, had dashed into the station, bearing with him news that Daniel Benton, the stock-tender, had been taken from his cabin and hanged, or put to death, by some of the Boy Bandit's gang, and that he had found the stockade deserted, the horses run off, and two papers pinned upon the door, one of which was a letter from the unfortunate man to his daughter Bessie, and the other a warning against the Wild Rider.

The news of her father's death had nearly overwhelmed poor Bessie Benton, who was building castles in the air of future happiness, for, that night, she was to have left Rocky Glen, in company with father and lover, to seek a home elsewhere.

But with the death of Daniel Benton, the lover, Little Grit, refused to leave Rocky Glen, and at once accepted a position offered him by Colonel Hewlett, and determined to stay right there in spite of the warning he had received.

"Who is goin' ter make ther music in ther air, Trumps?" asked a miner.

"Waal, ther bandits sees as how ther Glen are gittin' popilated, an' they is goin' to strike while they kin, an' ther colonel who is buildin' ther new fort hain't goin' ter be 'way back down ther lane, when thar's work ter be did."

"I thinks yer is right thar, pard; he hes ther look o' a fighter," remarked Bony Bob, another miner.

"Then, yer see, pards, Leetle Grit hain't goin' ter run off, skeert by threats, an' as ther colonel hes give him a commission of oftendant, you'll find he'll make it as hot fer ther Boy Bandit as he will fer him, if not hotter."

"I is sorry ther Little Grit has left ther road, fer he were ther boss o' all ther Riders," remarked a stableman of the Pony Express.

"Yas, Bunk, thet are so; for he's made things lively gossip with his ridin' in these diggin's, an' thar were few of us ever 'spected yer see ther lad come in any night or mornin'; but then, he were allus on time, as you knows."

"But it are a pity, jist now, as he was goin' ter go off with Benton, an' git spliced ter pretty Bessie, ter hev poor Dan kilt, an' hev ter stay, an' it's me as says ef he stays yer'll find he's goin' ter make music in ther hills."

"You is right, Trumps, fer thet are my opinion; but I'm thinkin' he's got a young feller as is ter take his place, an' hain't no slouch," remarked Bony Bob.

"No slouch! Waal, I kinder think not, fer he are Buffalo Bill!"

"And who is Buffalo Bill?" asked a tall, fine-looking, cruel-faced man, flashily dressed and wearing neatly fitting kid gloves upon his small hands, a circumstance that had gained for him the name of the Kid Glove Sport, for he was a gambler by profession.

"Who are Buffalo Bill, you axes, Gambler Gray?" inquired Trumps.

"Yes, who, and what is he?" almost insolently responded the Sport.

"Waal, he are a youth from Kansas, I had heerd, an' thar is as much man put up in his Pony Riding clothes as yer kin find in ther buckskin or mlnin' suit o' any party in this heur serloon."

"You know him, then?"

"I does, Kid Gloves; I know'd him when he were a boy bullwhacker down on the Mormon trail; then he were a guide, an' then a scout, an' he were fust-class at all, an' as he's tuk ter Pony Ridin' yer'll find he are a pard fer Leetle Grit."

"A queer name he has; but it seems I have heard it before."

"Yer doubtless hes, Kid Gloves, fer it hes traveled some, an' he deserves it, fer he are not only ther boss buffler-killer, young as he be, but he tackled a buffler bull once fer a ride, when ther Injins were arter him, droppin' down on ther bull out o' a tree, they says, an' ther ole critter tuk him right ter camp. Ef thar is anybody in these diggin's as b'lieves Buffalo Bill hain't weaned yit, though he's all o' twenty, jist pick him up fer a sardine, and yer'll drop him durn quick fer a shark. Thar's ther youth from Kansas now," and Trumps nodded toward the door, through which just entered a handsome young man of twenty, with a tall wiry form, dressed in a red velvet jacket, white corduroy pants, stuck in handsome top boots, which were armed with heavy gold spurs, and wearing upon his head a gray sombrero, encircled by a gold cord and looped up on the left side with a pin representing a spur.

He also wore an embroidered silk shirt, a black cravat, gauntlet gloves, and a sash of red silk, in which were stuck a pair of revolvers and a dirk-knife.

With his piercing black eyes, dark complexion, clear-cut features, and long brown hair hanging upon his shoulders he looked like some handsome young man masquerading as a cavalier, and yet nearly every one present had heard of that youth from Kansas and his daring exploits as a boy.

CHAPTE IV.

THE KID GLOVE SPORT.

"COME over here, Billy, or, as yer is crowdin' six feet, I guess yer'll hev ter be calt Bill now," cried Trumps, as the youth from Kansas entered the saloon, and glanced around him for a seat, and perhaps for a familiar face, for he was alone.

"Thank you, Ned Ross; yours is the only face I see that I recall. We were good pards in the long ago, and I hope we will be again now I am on a new trail," said the young Pony Rider with manly frankness, and he took a seat next to Trumps, who replied:

"We will fer a fact, Billy—I means Buffalo Bill."

"Oh, call me Billy, Bill, Cody, or Bison William, for I answer to all, and back at the starting station on the pony line I am called Gold Spurs, as I happen to wear a pair made of that precious metal, given me by Mr. Majors, whom you doubtless all know, and if you do not, I will tell you he is one of the squarest white men on the plains."

"We knows Mr. Majors, Bill, an' he are as yer say," replied Trumps, while the Kid Glove Sport, who had been intently eying the Pony Rider, remarked quietly:

"I should think you would be afraid to risk your gold spurs in your dangerous riding."

Buffalo Bill glanced quickly at the speaker, and in one sweeping glance seemed to read him, but answered indifferently:

"I risk my life in it, and why not my spurs?"

The man who gets the one must take the other first."

"Waal spoke, Bill; but let me interdooce yer ter my friends. This heur gamecock are Kid Glove, ther gambler, as we calls him, not havin' been his sponsors ter know how he were christened, an' he are a gambler, clean through, so you'll hev ter watch him ef yer shuffles ther pasteboards in his comp'ny. This are Bony Bob, an' he are a durned sight more bony than he are fleshy, as a blind man kin see, yet he are squar' to the marrer, which am more than I kin post up fer some as hears me chin; an' this feller are Bunk, ther boss o' ther pony stables, an' he has led out ther hosses fer Leetle Grit hisse't, an' will do as much fer you. This heur long-legged, lantern-jawed, cock-eyed gerloot are Digger Dave, ther Howlin' Hyena o' the Mines, ter he are ever howlin' an' never lickin' nobody, an'—"

"Hang it, Trumps, life's too short to have you introduce us all round, for I've got to take the run out at midnight, so let us take a drink, gentlemen, and trust in Providence for a better acquaintance. My Pilgrim of the Spirit Land, be good enough to give my friends the poison they prescribe for themselves! Come, gentlemen, all are included," and Buffalo Bill glanced over the room, and two score souls, for "spiritual consolation" at once ranged themselves in front of the bar, and drank to the health of the new Pony Rider.

"What is thet you is surroundin', Bill?" asked Trumps, eying the glass of his young friend.

"Water, Trumps."

"Water? What are water, Bill?" asked the amazed miner.

"Oh, it's a liquid I am very fond of."

"Does it make drunk come, as the Injuns say?" persisted Trumps.

"Not if taken in moderation, Trumps; but, you see, I never drink anything stronger, not even tea and coffee, for I've got to keep my nerves all right, as my life frequently depend upon a dead shot. Will you try a little, Trumps?"

"No, sir, not by a jug full! I is afeard it would p'izen me. Billy, give it up, or yer'll drown yerself some day."

A laugh followed the remark of Trumps, who seemed to have such an antipathy to water, and then Buffalo Bill's eyes fell upon the Kid Glove Sport, who remained seated at the table, and the Pony Rider said, apologetically:

"My invitation included you, sir."

"Doubtless, but I never drink, for, like you I must keep my nerves steady."

"As you please, sir; it is doubtless as necessary for you to have a clear head and steady hand in your business, as I require in mine."

"I do not understand you," returned the gambler, half rising, and his eyes flashing.

"Trumps said you were a card sharp, I believe," was the cool rejoinder.

"Yes, I am. Do you play?" was the quiet response of the gambler, where all present expected some violent rejoinder.

"Sometimes; but I won't be cheated."

"There is no man here will accuse me of cheating," declared the Kid Glove Sport.

"If I caught you at it, you'd hear from me, pard, and that I'll swear to, but don't let us quarrel, for I am inclined to like Rocky Glen and its people, only I can't understand why you all let the Boy Bandit run the road as he does."

"You will soon change your mind when you have ridden on his hunting ground a few days, and I wouldn't be surprised to hear of his wearing your gold spurs before long," remarked Gambler Grey, with a sinister smile.

"If he can get them he is welcome; Mr. Majors didn't give them to me to make a present of them to somebody else, and there will be a merry go-round before I take 'em off."

"I'll wager that you don't ride the road a week."

"I'll take the bet; name the sum," was the prompt response.

"Call it a hundred, and here's my money."
"And here is mine, and there's Judge Hunter for a stake-holder," lightly responded Buffalo Bill, as the host of the Rider's Rest entered the saloon.

Each better deposited his money in the hands of the judge, and then the Kid Glove Sport asked:

"Do you intend to ride as did Little Grit, the Wild Rider?"

"How was that?"

"Without a bridle on his horse, or rein of any kind."

"I have heard that was his style, long before I came up here, and I concluded to follow his example, so came in here to look him up."

"To get the secret of how he does it from him?" sneered the gambler.

"Oh, no; for I learned to ride without bridle and saddle; I wanted to get his horses, if he will sell them."

"You talk rich for a youngster."

"Oh, I intend to win the money from you to pay for them," was the smiling response, and Trumps broke out in a loud laugh in which he was joined by nearly all present.

"But if you do not buy the horses that the Wild Rider has trained?"

"Then I shall train others myself."

"I have a horse I will sell you."

"A good animal?"

"A better is not on this border," declared the Kid Glove Sport, proudly.

"Do you know the horse, Trumps?" and the young Pony Rider turned to his old friend.

"I does."

"Does Kid Gloves speak true of his horse?"

"Yas, the horse is a lightnin' goer, but thar are more distilled hellfire in him than in a whole team o' kickin' mules."

"The very horse I want! I'll take him, Gloves."

"You have not asked the price yet."

"Hang the price! if I want him I'll have him if he's for sale; but, what do you want for him?"

"I'll give him to you, if you will ride him to-night from here without a bridle," was the unexpected response.

"I'll do it," was the quick acceptance of the offer, and it brought a grim, cruel smile to the face of the gambler, while Trumps remarked to Bony Bob:

"That durned sport are puttin' up a job on that youth from Kansas, an' a blind man kin see that them two isn't goin' ter be lovin' gards."

CHAPTER V. THE INSULT.

"You will ride the horse, Red Devil, without a bridle, if I will give him to you?" almost eagerly asked the gambler.

"Certainly; only I have no right to accept a present from you," replied Buffalo Bill.

"Ef he's fool enough ter offer his hoss, Bill, you be wise man enough ter take him."

"I knows ther horse, an' he are Satin's imp on four legs; but I hes seen you ride, an' I don't go back on sayin' yer is ther ekal o' ther Wild Rider, fer no man kin be better," remarked Trumps, while the Pony Rider said, again addressing the gambler in his pleasant way.

"You shall not be the loser, Kid Gloves, for I'll bet you that I ride your Red Devil the fifteen mile run to the station, and bring him back to-morrow on time. If I fail, you get your horse back, and win my money. What do you consider him worth?"

"I have been offered three hundred dollars for him."

"Then here is the money, and I put it in the hands of the judge," and the Pony Rider took out a roll of bills, which caused the gambler to say insinuatingly:

"You are not broke yet."

"No, I have a little money left, which perhaps you want."

"If I can win it, yes."

"There is nothing like trying, and I have time yet."

"Wait until I tell my Chinese servant to have Red Devil ready," and the Kid Glove Sport left the saloon, while Judge Hunter remarked, as he drew a chair up to the table:

"I fear you have not made a very valuable acquaintance, Cody."

"Oh yes, judge; I rather like men of his stripe."

"I think he will not say the same of you, for he evidently has evil intentions against you, in wishing you to ride Red Devil, for, excepting Kid Gloves and his Chinese servant, no one dare go near the horse; but you come well recommended as a rider, and came in on time to-day though you had never been over the road before, and met with some detention."

Buffalo Bill smiled, but made no reply, and Bony Bob said in a low tone to Trumps:

"I guesses ther new 'un is a-goin' ter be ekal to ther ole 'un."

"I guesses he are, Bony; but it are a precious pair, Wild Rider, an' Billy."

"So it are; but, heur comes Kid Gloves back again," and room was made for him at the table.

Seating himself, with a pleasant smile the gambler said:

"The horse will be ready for you, Buffalo Bill, so now let us have a little game."

"I am willing, Kid Gloves; there is my pile," and he cast the roll of bills upon the table.

"What! do you intend to risk all you have?" asked Judge Hunter.

"Oh yes, sir; why not?"

"Ther Sport will make a clean sweep o' it, pard," warned Trumps.

"Yas, clean yer out o' dust ther fust go round," put in Bony Bob.

"I'll take the chances, and if I lose it's my loss; I am ready, Gloves."

The gambler called for a pack of cards, and shuffling them, the two drew for deal and Buffalo Bill lost.

Then the game began, was rapidly played through, and Buffalo Bill won.

"You are not such a sharp after all, Gloves, or you didn't cheat that game; which was it?" asked the Pony Rider in his light, reckless way.

"You won fairly, sir," was the unruffled reply, and again the lookers on were disappointed, for they had expected an outburst of passion, as few men dare speak to the Kid Glove Sport as the Pony Rider had done.

"I know that; if I was a cheat at cards, I'd be a cut-throat too, for there's no difference; will you play again?"

"Yes," was the abrupt response, and once more the game was played, and once more won by Buffalo Bill.

"Pard, yer is losing yer grip," said Trumps, addressing the gambler.

"You haven't been drinking, have you, to lose your nerve?" innocently asked Buffalo Bill, as a third time he was the winner.

"No, sir, I am playing fair, and you are—"

"What?" and the muzzle of a revolver suddenly looked squarely in the face of the Kid Glove Sport, and the finger of Buffalo Bill lightly rested upon the trigger; but, with death staring him in the face, the gambler did not flinch, or lose color, as he said:

"You are as quick on the draw as you are in fingering the cards."

"You mean that I cheat?" demanded Buffalo Bill quietly.

"I do."

"Retract that, or I will kill you!"

Every man in the room was now upon his feet, and all eyes were upon the Kid Glove Sport and Buffalo Bill, for that the latter meant what he said there was no doubt whatever.

CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE GRIT CHIPS IN.

For full a minute not a word was spoken, and not a sound broke the silence in the room,

other than the suppressed breathing of the men.

It was a thrilling tableau, one to be remembered by those who saw it, for the gambler sat in his chair, his eyes gazing into those of Buffalo Bill, who, with one arm resting upon the table, across which he was leaning, and the other holding his revolver within a foot of the face of the man who had insulted him, showed by his firm-set lips and burning glance that he intended to touch the trigger if his enemy did not retract the insult.

"Shall it be life or death for you, Kid Gloves?"

The silence was broken by Buffalo Bill, and all anxiously awaited the reply of the gambler.

At last it came, and in a voice strangely calm.

"I am no fool, Cody, so I say life, as I wish not to die yet, having some few little business engagements on hand which I care not to break."

"And you retract your words?"

"Yes, for I do not believe you cheated, and only said so to try you."

"And you tried me, I hope, to your satisfaction," was the dry response of the Pony Rider, as he lowered his revolver and returned it to his belt.

"Of course you will give me satisfaction by playing another game?" added the Kid Glove Sport.

"Yes, if you wish it, for I have time," was the indifferent response, and again they seated themselves at the table, and once more the crowd gathered eagerly around the two players.

The game at once began, and was played deliberately through, the players only now and then breaking the silence with a word or two, and at the end the gambler was the winner.

"It is not yet midnight; perhaps you would like another game?" suggested the Kid Glove Sport.

"Upon one condition."

"What is it?"

"That the man who slipped you cards before, under the table, stands out of reach of you," was the remark of Buffalo Bill.

"Do you mean to accuse me of unfair play?" angrily asked the gambler.

"Yes," and as Buffalo Bill spoke he attempted to draw his revolver, but his arm was seized with a strong grasp by the very man, a heavily-bearded, hang-dog-faced miner, whom he had accused of aiding the gambler.

This act gave the Kid Glove Sport time to bring his weapon to a level, and he said, determinedly:

"Now, sir, I hold trumps, you see, and I shall play them, too, if you do not retract your insult to me."

"Yes, turn-about is fair play, pards," said the man who held the arm of Buffalo Bill.

"Do you intend to retract your accusation?" sternly asked the gambler.

"No."

"I will kill you if you do not."

"I will again assert that I saw that man hand you cards," firmly declared the Pony Rider.

"Stick to it pard, ef yer seen it, an' I'll take a leetle hand too," chipped in Trumps, whose weapon covered the man who held Buffalo Bill.

"You love life, I suppose!" sneered the gambler to the Pony Rider.

"Oh, yes," was the light response.

"Then retract, or I will kill you."

"I am not a coward like you."

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

A deathlike stillness fell upon all, and a score of men present held their weapons, and the result hung by a thread, for the Kid Glove Sport had his satellites there, and there were a number who would side with the Pony Rider.

With a cruel smile, Gambler Grey ran his eye along the barrel of his revolver, which

pointed full at the forehead of Buffalo Bill, who, unflinchingly looked squarely into the threatening muzzle.

Then the finger of the gambler toyed with the trigger, and ere it gave a full pressure up went the arm that held it, and a clear voice said:—

"Permit me to take a hand in this game, gentlemen!"

The spell was broken, and a sigh of relief seemed to break from every lip, while all eyes now turned upon the speaker, to behold a slenderly formed young man in pony riding costume, and a frank, fearless, handsome face that all in Rocky Glen knew well.

"Little Grit!"

"The Wild Rider!"

"Ther boss of ther road!"

The cries arose on all sides, and then came, in the hoarse voice of Trumps:

"As usual, on time you is, leetle pard."

Unheeding the excitement his coming had created, Little Grit, the Wild Rider, turned his gaze upon the Kid Glove Sport, and said:

"Grey, I too say you are a card sharp of the worst kind, and I am answerable for my words."

"Brave words, when your revolver covers my heart," sneered the gambler.

"Oh, I'll throw them in your teeth at any time, as did Buffalo Bill just now, when you held him at disadvantage."

"But, Cody, your time is up, and if you wish to continue your quarrel with this fellow, do it on your return, if I don't have to kill him before you get back."

"All right, Wild Rider; but, I have a wager with him, so let the matter stand until my return."

"Now, Kid Gloves, where is your horse, for I must be off within five minutes?"

"I will go for him, if Wild Rider will take his revolver out of my face," was the sullen reply.

"On yes, but mind you, no treachery," and Little Grit lowered his weapon; and the gambler leaving the saloon, all followed him.

As they halted in front of the tavern, there was heard the clatter of hoofs, and the next moment a horseman was seen flying along the moonlit trail.

The next instant he drew rein before the Rider's Rest, and Judge Hunter sung out:

"Pony Rider Pet on time! Pony Rider Buffalo Bill to the front!"

"Ay, ay, sir," and Buffalo Bill stepped up, ready for his run out of eighty-six long miles.

CHAPTER VII.

THE START AND THE TRAILERS.

"CLEAR the way there!"

The stern order came from the lips of the Kid Glove Gambler, and around the corner of the Rider's Rest came a plunging horse held by two persons.

"Here is the Red Devil, Cody; now to carry out your words," sneered the gambler, as with the assistance of Chopee Stickee, his Chinese servant, he halted a large, fine-looking but vicious blood-bay before the piazza.

There was a general rush to give the horse plenty of room, for his devilish nature was well known in Rocky Glen, and the Chinese took up the Pony Rider's light saddle, to which Judge Hunter had already attached the express bags, and started toward the animal with it, while the gambler tried to quiet him by words and patting.

"Puttee on thisee way?" asked Chopee Stickee, nudging Buffalo Bill in a peculiar way, as he asked the question.

"Yes, I'll put it on you," answered the Pony Rider.

"No, Chopee knowee; Red Devlee killee Ridee," as the Chinese gave Buffalo Bill another nudge, and started toward the fiery horse with the saddle.

"That Chinese put a piece of paper under the strap of the express bag," said Little Grit in a whisper to Buffalo Bill, who answered quietly:

"Thank you; I saw it."

Then he advanced toward Red Devil, who had worked himself into a fearful humor, and was biting at the gambler even.

"Cody, I do not wish you to ride that horse," cried Judge Hunter, and as he spoke there came out upon the piazza a tall man in military uniform, and two maidens.

"No, Bill, don't tackle ther devil, fer he is durnedly like his owner," said Trumps.

"Ef it were ther Wild Rider it would be difrent," suggested Bony Bob.

"Gentlemen, I trust you will not worry on my account," remarked Buffalo Bill, pulling on his gauntlet gloves and drawing his whip out of his bootleg, where he always carried it when not in use.

"Allow me to suggest, sir, that you are taking too great a risk to ride that horse. Why, the animal is mad!" said Colonel Hewlett, the gentleman in uniform.

"The wager is to ride him without a bridle, colonel," cried Judge Hunter anxiously.

"Oh father! do not permit him to be so rash!" The words were spoken by Helen Hewlett, and the soft pleading voice caused Buffalo Bill to glance toward her; then, by a sudden impulse he bounded forward, and with a mighty leap was in the saddle.

"Let go!"

Sternly the order rung from his lips, and, as the Kid Glove Gambler and Chopee Stickee loosened their holds and sprung out of the way, the vicious horse reared wildly, and pawing savagely walked along on his hind feet.

"Without a bridle was the wager!" shouted the Kid Glove Sport, hoarsely.

"Ay, ay!" answered Buffalo Bill, and he was seen to grasp the head-stall; then came a gleam of steel, and the bridle fell to the ground!

With a furious snort Red Devil bounded forward, amid a wild chorus of yells, and from the lips of Buffalo Bill, came a stern:

"Go!"

Down, upon the glossy hide fell the keen whip! Into the heaving flanks sunk the gold spurs, and with a cry of pain, terror and rage commingled the frantic animal sprung away along the trail.

There was a short view of a flying steed and fearless rider, and then they swept from the view of the excited, cheering crowd, in the midst of whom stood Grey, the Kid Glove Sport, a triumphant smile upon his handsome, but cruel face.

"Didn't I tell yer he were ther twin o' Leetle Grit, ther Wild Rider?" cried Trumps, enthusiastically.

"Yer did fer a fact, Trumps; but I wonder ef he'll ever be heard from ag'in, fer ther Red Devil started off as though he were goin' to Kingdom Come," answered Bony Bob, and the two returned to the saloon, where most of the crowd had already preceded them, leaving the front of the tavern deserted by all but one person.

That person was a man, standing in the shadow, and apparently watching for some one.

For some minutes he stood as silent as a statue, and then his eye caught sight of something moving along the edge of a row of shanties not far away.

"It is as I thought; Kid Gloves is already on the trail of Buffalo Bill, and I will be on his!" muttered the man, and leaving his place of observation he quietly glided around the corner of the hotel, to soon after appear on horseback.

As he moved slowly along the trail taken by Buffalo Bill and the Kid Glove Sport, the moonlight falling upon him revealed that it was Little Grit, and that he was mounted upon a splendid black horse that wore no bridle, yet seemed under the perfect control of his young master.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIDER'S REST.

In a pleasant room of the Rider's Rest sat three persons in conversation, although the

hour was past midnight, and they were speaking of the new Pony Rider, as Buffalo Bill was called, and his daring in riding Red Devil, the horse of the Kid Glove Sport.

There were in the room a gentleman and two ladies, the same who had gone out on the piazza to see the departure of the Express Rider, and having seen him disappear around a curve in the trail they had returned to the room of the colonel, who had just come on to Rocky Glen to assume command of that portion of the border.

"I fear I am keeping you up, and worrying you with my grief," said Bessie Benton, the pretty daughter of the man whose forebodings of evil had so soon fallen upon him, and who but a short while before had heard the news of her father's death at the hands of the Bandits.

"Do not speak of it, my child, for we feel deeply for you in your grief, and know well how dreary would be the night to you were you alone," said Colonel Hewlett, kindly, while his daughter Helen responded:

"Yes, indeed, we do feel for you, and hope the morning will bring good tidings, for I cannot believe that those men, vile as they are, would deliberately kill your father, who never harmed them."

"Ah, Miss Hewlett, you do not know the black hearts of the men who serve under the Boy Bandit; they have slain my poor father I feel assured, and I am alone in the world."

"Do not say so, Bessie, for you shall remain with Helen, and be like a daughter to me, and Judge Hunter seems very fond of you, and most anxious to adopt you," said the colonel.

"And there is one other who would not like to hear you say you were alone in the world," archly remarked Helen Hewlett.

"You are all very kind, my friends, but do you know I have a presentiment of evil to come? and, as much as I would wish to see the murderers of my father punished, I dread to have Little Grit remain here, knowing that he has sworn to avenge him."

"And he will do so, for he is one of the pluckiest men I ever saw, and I am glad I made him a lieutenant, so you will have to call your lover Lieutenant Hewlett Lamdell, now, Bessie, instead of Little Grit and Wild Rider," said the colonel, with a smile.

"His nicknames will never desert him, sir, should he rise to your rank, as long as he remains on the border—hark!"

All listened and heard a horse going by, and rising the colonel looked out.

"It is Wild Rider—I mean Lieutenant Lamdell," he said, recognizing him in the moonlight.

"Ah me! that is why I dread evil, for I know he has gone on some expedition of danger," said Bessie nervously.

"Do not have any dread, Bessie, for in the morning I will myself start out with a squadron of cavalry, and begin the good work of hunting down these outlaws."

"I did wish to get my fort built first, but in the mean time they may do much mischief, so I will strike at once a blow which they will remember."

Then, to himself he added, as he saw the youth disappear around the curve which Buffalo Bill had taken:

"I wonder where that daring youth has gone to-night?"

His mental query was almost immediately answered by a knock at the door, and the entrance of Judge Hunter, who said, in his blunt way:

"Well, Bessie, you will have to keep that lover of yours in the traces, for he has gone off after that devil in human shape Grey."

"Oh judge! where have they gone?" eagerly asked Bessie, and seeing his mistake, the boss of the Rider's Rest quickly said:

"Oh, don't worry, for he can take care of himself; but shortly after Buffalo Bill went off on that mad horse, Kid Gloves, as we call Grey, mounted and followed, and one of the stable boys told me just now, that Wild

Rider, or rather Lieutenant Lamdell, as I must call your *protege* now, colonel, sprung upon his black steed Firefly, and went in pursuit; but I guess it is only to find out whether the Pony Rider got killed or not by that beast."

"Yes, I guess that is why he went, judge; but do you know aught of this daring young rider who has come to take the place of Lieutenant Lamdell?" asked Colonel Hewlett.

"I have heard of him often before as a remarkable youth, and his daringly mounting that mad horse of Grey's proves the stories regarding him are likely true; he certainly is a dashing, handsome fellow, a little dandified in his dress perhaps, but with the courage of a lion and nerve of an Indian chief, as I saw to-night, for we had a lively scene in the saloon, colonel, an hour ago, of which I wish you could have been an eye-witness."

"There was no shooting, I hope, judge?" asked the colonel.

"Oh no, though at one time I thought there would be, as the Kid Glove Sport held a revolver in Buffalo Bill's face, and who faced it without a quiver, but just then Little Grit—I beg his pardon, Lieutenant Lamdell chipped in and put an end to the trouble by knocking up the arm of the Sport."

"And who is this man they call the Kid Glove Sport, Judge?" asked the colonel.

"Now you ask me a puzzling question, colonel, for I do not know."

"He is, as you have seen yourself, a man of striking appearance, a gentleman in manners when he wishes to be, and has evidently seen far different days in the past, for he has a superior education, sings divinely, as the ladies would say, and yet is a perfect devil at heart."

"He has no occupation, other than that of gambling, is a most successful player, or a cunning cheat as Buffalo Bill called him to-night, and wields a great influence here, not only among the miners, but with the settlers, stable-boys and all."

"Do you know his name?" asked Colonel Hewlett.

"Only what he calls himself, Grey, and the boys have put Gambler before it, and from his habit of always wearing kid gloves, have nicknamed him the Kid Glove Sport."

"But does he always wear gloves?" asked Helen, with considerable interest.

"Yes, Miss Helen; at least no man on this border has seen him without them day or night, eating or sleeping; but come, Bessie, your room is ready for you, and it opens into Miss Helen's, so you will not be lonely, and I hope in the morning we can get better news for you."

"No, Judge Hunter, I feel that my poor father is dead," said Bessie sadly, and bidding the gentlemen good-night, the maidens repaired to their respective rooms, the fatherless girl to weep herself to sleep, and Helen Hewlett to dream of the dark eyes of the handsome Pony Express Rider she had seen fly away like the very wind up the mountain trail.

CHAPTER IX.

GOLD PLUME, THE BOY BANDIT.

It was a most stylish turnout, the new and dazzling stage coach, which the Overland Stage Coach Company had put on the road to run to Rocky Glen, as the pioneer of others to follow, and Ben Trotter the driver, as he held the ribbons over the backs of six handsome iron-grays, felt as proud as a peacock in the sunshine.

"This are No. One, an' I are handed down to posterity as ther fust driver as carried her through," he muttered to himself, as he sat on his high box, with the pride of an emperor on his throne.

The company had taken the Pony trail for their coach road, and a company of men, with spades and picks, had gone along it to prepare the way for the stylish vehicles to be put on, and Ben Trotter, a splendid driver, had made good time on his first trip.

"I are the fust through," he again muttered to himself, as a distant column of smoke told

him that Rocky Glen terminus, was not very far away.

"But I are not *through* yit, an' thar is slip-ups made sometimes durned near home, an' I don't like thet gloomy gal inside ther hearse," and Ben Trotter glanced back at the vehicle.

"I'd as soon haul a stiff to ther bone-yard then a woman in black, and what hides her face under a veil ther devil c'u'dn't see through, an' I heard several say as I started she'd bring me bad luck; but I hopes not, 'deed I does," and Ben chirped to his iron-grays, and they took a quicker step, and the rumbling wheels sent back many an echo from the rocky hills.

"This are a durned lonely piece o' road ter drive at night, I'm tellin' yer, an' I hopes not ter be late along here, fer them Bandits they tells of might make it onhealthy fer me."

"But thet Wild Rider o' ther Pony Express hes scooted through day an' night all right, an' I hopes I will too—"

"Halt! up with your hands!"

"Thet settles it; I know'd I wasn't through yit, durn 'em!" growled Ben Trotter, while, well knowing what the ringing demand, that issued from the roadside, meant, he put on his brake, drew hard on his wheelers, and came to a stand-still.

"What ish te matter, driver?" asked a man's voice, and a face, with a Hebrew cast of countenance, was thrust out of the coach window.

"Now don't you be over-cur'us, Jew, fer yer'll find out too durned soon what are ther matter," grumbled Ben, and he threw his hands above his head quickly, as again came the stern order:

"Up with your hands, there!"

"They is up, yer durned ornery devils; now do yer leetle robbin' act, and let ther hearse go on, fer this are ther fust trip, an' I wants ter be on time."

As the driver ceased speaking a horseman rode forth from behind a spruce-covered rock, and halted near the stage-coach, into which he gave a hasty glance.

"Durned ef it hain't ther Boy Bandit hisself," muttered Ben Trotter, as he looked earnestly upon the horseman, and aloud he said:

"Ef yer is alone, Boy Pard, I'll take ther chances o' drivin' over yer."

"I am not alone," was the quiet reply of the horseman.

"Show me yer baint a liar, or git out o' ther way," yelled Ben, as he drew a revolver from his belt, but he quickly let it go, and added:

"Hold on! yer was talkin' gospil, an' I hasn't a word ter say; don't let 'em shoot, fer I don't want ter be made a pepper-box of."

The horseman smiled, and waved his hand, and a score of forms that had arisen before the astonished gaze of the driver, as suddenly disappeared.

"Who have you in your coach, and what booty do you carry?" sternly asked the road-agent, and he rode closer to the vehicle, and all had a good look at him as he sat with graceful ease upon his snow-white horse, and they were dumb with amazement that one with such a face could have won a name so vile, for dark stories were told of Cold Plume the Boy Bandit.

"Waal, them as said you were as pretty as a gal, hasn't lied ag'in' yer," muttered Ben Trotter, and with a species of fascination he gazed upon the darkly bronzed, but perfectly featured face, the superb dark eyes, that seemed to be looking back into some unhappy scene in the past, rather than interested in the present, and the mouth so full of expression, yet strangely stern for one so young.

More like a beautiful girl the Boy Bandit looked, than the cruel youth men called him, and his form was as slender, and his movements as graceful as a woman's, while he was dressed in a full Mexican suit, made of the richest material, and lavishly trimmed with gold lace and buttons.

The sombrero, black, with a silver wreath

embroidery encircling it, had on the left side a plume made of *gold thread*, and a piece of rare workmanship, and which had given him his name among his followers.

In his belt which was also embroidered in silver, and half hidden by a yellow silk sash, were four revolvers, two on each hip, and a small sword, for it was longer than the largest knife, hung from a chain on his left side.

His saddle and trappings were also of the Mexican pattern, and sparkled with ornaments, and a lariat hung from the broad horn.

"I asked you who you carried, and what booty?" said Gold Plume, repeating his question.

"Durned ef yer didn't, an' durned ef I didn't fergit ter answer, as ther sight o' yer tuk me aback so," bluntly replied Ben Trotter.

"Yes, it is our first acquaintance, but it will not be our last," said the youthful bandit.

"I is sorry it is ther fust, an' sorrier it won't be ther last."

"Do you intend to answer my question?" and with the rapidity of a flash, Gold Plume drew a silver-mounted revolver and leveled it straight at Ben Trotter's head, while his finger toyed threateningly with the trigger.

CHAPTER X.

UNMASKED.

"Hold on, pard, I intends ter say my catechiz correct from now I lay me to amen," cried Ben Trotter, as he saw that the Boy Bandit was in deadly earnest.

"Well then answer the question I asked you."

"Waal let me see; yer wants ter know who I has along?"

"Yes."

"Men, or women?"

"Both."

"I thought as how sich a good-lookin' fellow as you was, were a ladies' man."

"You are trifling, sir."

"Nary, pard, I doesn't trifle with death; yer see it are—"

"Once more, Ben Trotter, do you intend to answer my questions?"

"I does; thar is in this heur old hearse—no it are a new one—a lady in black clothes, an' I am a-thinkin' her face are as dismal as her toggery; then thar are a Jew, a reg'lar out an' outer from Hebrew alley, Jerusalem, as yer c'u'd tell by a look at his nose."

"Never mind your criticisms, sir, but tell me who else there is in the coach."

"A spry young feller as hes no biz in these diggin's, an' a miner as is goin' out ter dig fer dust."

"Any one else?"

"Nary."

"Now what booty is there aboard?"

"I didn't ask 'em what they carried in ther shape o' dust."

"What do you carry for the company?"

"Nothin'."

"You are lying to me."

"Waal, thet are flat-footed enough, I must say."

"You know it; you have the money with you to pay off the Pony Express Riders, and directed to Judge Hunter at Rider's Rest."

"Say, young feller, yer don't mean it."

"I do."

"Waal, you is mistaken."

"Ben Trotter, you are known as a clever but liar along the entire Overland, an' I do not hand out that package, thet is ther perfect a tombstone over you, and ha— out on it, 'Died from lying.'"

Ben looked around him uneasily, as he did have ten thousand dollars in his pocket, and he deemed it a secret known only to himself and the manager of the Pony Express Company.

He had had ocular demonstration that Gold Plume was not alone, and he believed enough regarding the Boy Bandit, to feel that he would not stand trifling with, so he was in sore trouble, for resistance would be useless, or even worse than madness.

"I tell yer, pard, I'll compromise the matter; rob ther pilgrims in ther hearse, an—"

"No compromise, Ben Trotter; that package or your life."

"Take ther durned old package," and Ben took a large envelope with a seal on it and threw it upon the ground at the hoofs of the white horse.

"Ah! you can come to terms when necessary; now, Jew, let me see your face," and the Boy Bandit rode nearer the coach and gazed within.

"Yesh, my tear, it ish a pleasant tay," and an unmistakable Hebrew visage was thrust out of the window, the teeth chattering with fear.

"You have not paid toll, sir."

"Ah, vell, how mooch ish it?"

"One hundred dollars."

"Mine Moses! I ish not got—"

"Don't lie, Jew; pay, or—"

"But, mine fri'nd, I vill sent you te monish," whined the Jew.

"No; I will keep you until I get the money."

"Holy Isaacs! you ish don't mean it."

"I do."

"Vell, I ish have a leetle monish mit me, dat ish pelong to mine brudder Yacob, and—"

"Hand it out, sir."

Sorrowfully the Jew obeyed, and then sinking back upon his seat, he waited to see what the Gold Plume would demand of the others, for misery most truly loves company.

"Here, sir robber, is my purse; it is all I have with me," and the lady in mourning held forth her hand.

"Keep it; I do not rob women."

"Thank you," and drawing her thick veil more closely over her face, the woman sunk back in her seat.

"Well, sir, I wish your toll," and the Gold Plume turned to a sad-faced youth that sat on the front seat by the side of a man clad in mining-costume.

"I have but a dollar; you are welcome to that," said the youth, quietly.

"You are poor, then?" asked the Boy Bandit.

"Yes; and unfortunate."

"I do not rob your kind; here, take this," and the Boy Bandit tossed him the roll of bills given him by the Jew, who cried, quickly:

"Ah! dat ish mine! you ish vill not takes mine monish, po?"

"If you touch that money, sir, I'll put a bullet through your brain," sternly said the Boy Bandit.

"A pullet mit mine prain," cried the Jew, and he shrunk back into his seat again, while the youth said, proudly:

"I do not take stolen goods, sir bandit."

"Hal you speak well; so be it, go on to yonder mines and see how long you will remain honest," and taking back the money, the Gold Plume turned to the miner and said:

"I am waiting, sir."

"You can't git blood out o' a turnip, pard," was the laconic response.

"You, too, are poor, then?"

"Waal, I kinder reckon I is; ef yer was ter sell yer elf fer a cent, I c'dn't buy ther halter ter hang yer with."

"How is it you can afford to ride?"

"Gad, afford it, pard; played Ben Trotter fer the side ag'in' my ole claim back in ther mines, an' I won, an' I is agoin' ter dig a tin out o' ther hills at Rocky Glen."

"I es a leetle terbaccy ef yer'll bite off a sw, an' han' balance back ter me, you kin," Gold Plume gazed fixedly into the face of the miner for an instant, and then said:

"We ha' met before, and we will meet again."

"I hope so, pard, fer you is a prime young gerleot," said the miner innocently, as with another sweeping glance at those in the coach, Gold Plume drew his horse back, and said sternly:

"Go!"

"I'll do it, you bet," and Ben Trotter called

to his iron-grays and they started rapidly forward, and almost instantly rolled from sight around a bend in the road.

Hardly had they done so, when the miner sprung to his feet, scrambled out through the window, to the box alongside of the driver, and cried eagerly:

"Lay it on, Ben, for I handed you up only an envelope filled with copies of the pay roll, and not the money; they'll soon find it out."

"Duration! I knows thet voice!"

"Yes, I am Little Grit—the Wild Rider! lay on your whip!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FLIGHT.

"PARD, I hasn't seen yer fer months, but I is more than glad ter grip yer fist now," and Ben Trotter turned on his seat, and held forth his hand to little Grit, who grasped it firmly, while he said quickly:

"Give me your whip, Ben, for when the Boy Bandit finds out that we have fooled him, he will give chase."

"That are so—whew! does yer heur thet howl? they is comin now."

Loudly then did Ben call to his grays to jump ahead, and Little Grit, in his disguise as a miner, laid the whip on with a skill that showed he knew well how to handle it.

Into a full run the horses broke, and with his reins held well in hand Ben Trotter guided them along the road, while the vehicle swayed wildly to and fro, causing the Jew inside to call out lustily to come to a halt.

"Shut up, yer hok-nosed Israelite, or I'll stop an' put yer out fer ther bandits ter kill."

"Say, youngs er, inside ther hearse, ef thet old Israel makes any more fuss, jest tap him on ther head an' send ther bill ter me," called out Ben Trotter, and his threat, and the advice given the youth how to treat him, at once silenced the Jew's cries, and he bent his every energy to holding himself in his seat, for the road was by no means a smooth one, and going at the pace they were, the horses dragged the stage along in a manner that threatened demolition.

But Ben Trotter was a master of the reins, and his quick eyes picked out every obstacle to be avoided, and the whip in the hands of the disguised Wild Rider, urged the horses on at breakneck speed.

"It are better ter smash up, pard, then ter be tortured ter death, an' they'll do it ef they catches us," said the driver.

"Yes, they will make short work of you and me, Ben, for I half believe that Gold Plume recognized me, or at least felt sure I was disguised, but why he did not capture me, I know not, unless he saw that I was ready to kill him should he sing out."

"An' you'd 'a' done it, pard, fer I knows yer."

"Yes, had he made a motion, I would have shot him, let the consequences to me be what they might."

"But how is it yer is rigged out in this heur trim, an' hes hair enough on yer face fer a full grown b'ar?"

"Oh, I have been up to a little game, Ben, so don't give me away to the boys at the station," answered Hewlett Lamdell.

"I'll not, yer kin bet; but jist ter think yer sot down and played me fer a passage through ter Rocky Glen, an' won it too."

"I did that for a blind, for I have, as you know, a free pass on the Overland coaches."

"Waal, yer did it well, an' ther boys won't know yer when yer git in."

"We are not there yet, Ben."

"Thet are so, an' jist look how ther fellers is a-comin' arter us."

"Yes, there are twenty of them, and Gold Plume is leading; it is fortunate he did not look at the package before we left."

"It are fortunite, pard; go 'long, yer l-zy critters, fer don't yer heur ther sound o' hoof ahint yer? go 'long, I tells yer! hit thet cussed leader, Wild Rider, fer he are hangin' back."

The whip descended sharply upon the horse

mentioned, and with renewed speed the team dashed on.

"Ef anything should break now, pard, we'd keep right on ter kingdom come, for heur are ther long hill," said Ben Trotter.

"Never mind the hill, Ben; but keep them at it, for we can gain on them going down, though they will recover lost time as we go up from the valley; but once up that hill and we are safe," coolly said Hewlett Lamdell.

"That are Gospil truth, pard, but it are a mile yit, to the fust shanty in Rocky Glen."

"And they are two hundred yards behind us, Ben, and I'll try my shooting-irons if they come closer."

"They will shoot back."

"Well, we must take our chances. Inside therel" and the young officer bent over and looked in the coach window.

"Vell, mine frint, vot ish te matter?" asked the Jew.

"I am going to shoot at the bandits."

"Tat ish goot, so goot."

"But they will fire back again."

"Ah, dat ish pad, vera pad."

"Let the lady and youth crouch down in the bottom of the coach, and pile the cushions and baggage up so as to guard them."

"And me, mine frint, and me?" gasped the Jew.

"You lie down on ther back seat so as ter stop ther bullits," yelled Ben Trotter.

"Holy Isaacs!"

"Quick! protect yourselves as best you can, for the bandits are in range now," cried the disguised officer, and raising his revolver he quickly fired.

Down to the earth went a horse, and his rider was thrown far over his head, and lay there stunned, or killed, Hewlett Lamdell hoped the latter.

"Ef yer did miss ther Boy Bandit, yer kilt one o' ther gang," said Trotter.

"I brought down the one I fired at, for I care not to kill Gold Plume, as I wish one day to take him alive; the man on the big bay is my game now, Ben," and watching his chance, when the stage was running smoothly, he leveled his revolver a second time and fired.

"By the Rockies! yer got him," shouted Ben, as the big bay sprung forward, and his rider fell to the ground, rolled over and over with the impetus he had, and then lay in a heap.

"There it comes!" said Lamdell, and both men dodged down into the boat, as half a dozen revolvers cracked, and the bullets came flying after them.

One struck the top of the coach, and tore an ugly hole, and another clipped one of the gray leaders on the hip, but nobody was hurt, and once more the youth fired, and again his well-aimed shot hit its mark, and a bandit's horse went down.

And down the long hill, flying at the top of their speed, went the six grays, dragging the swaying, bounding, rattling coach after them in a way that was enough to spread terror to the stoutest heart.

But at last the valley was reached, and, as Hewlett Lamdell had predicted, the coach had gained on its pursuers, who dare not ride so rapidly down the hill.

But on the level valley road they again gained, and when the ascent of the mountain began, they seemed to be coming on at a speed that must soon bring them alongside, and again Hewlett Lamdell opened fire, and his foes answering, a constant rattle of revolvers followed, and Ben Trotter got a slight wound on the arm, and another of the grays received a bullet in his neck.

"The horses will follow the road, Ben, so lay your whip on, and I'll look after those fellows," cried Lamdell, and standing up he faced to the rear, and with a revolver in each hand, sent shot after shot among the bandits to check their advance, for they were now not far away.

But presently down went one of the leaders, a shot in his brain, and the coach came to a sudden halt that well-nigh threw the driver,

and Wild Rider from the box, and caused a scream, and a groan to come from within the vehicle.

For an instant things looked very black for the flying party; but just as the two men on the stage prepared to fight it out, a horseman dashed by, coming down the hill from Rocky Glen, and with a wild yell charged toward the bandits, who instantly turned in full flight.

"By Heaven! it is the Kid Glove Sport, and single-handed he has run upon them. Ben, I have wronged that man, and I shall tell him so," said Hewlett Lamdell earnestly.

"He hev saved our checks from bein' called in, that are sartin; shut up, yer durned Hebrew Jew! yer knows durned well ther bandits is gone, or yer wouldn't be axin' ter git out an' slay 'em," and Ben Trotter jumped from his box to cut loose from the dead leader.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WAGER WON.

I WILL now return to Buffalo Bill, who the reader will remember dashed away from Rocky Glen at midnight, mounted on Red Devil, the vicious horse of the Kid Glove Sport, and who was almost as generally feared as was his master.

With his keen whip he had forced the flying bay to take the right trail, after leaving the mining hamlet, and then allowed to run along at his will for quite a distance; but when he came to where the road divided, one trail leading around the base of the mountain, and the other straight into the hills, he again attempted to guide the animal by his whip.

But Red Devil was in no pleasant mood, and in spite of the keen lash, held straight on, into the mountains.

Although Buffalo Bill was a new hand at Pony Express Riding in that part of the country, he had before been to Rocky Glen and its vicinity, and knew that if the horse held on as he was going, he would soon be in a locality where it was most dangerous to ride even at a walk, and he determined to do all in his power to check him.

But that was impossible, for the vicious animal held on, and the young Pony Rider put his hand on his revolver, as though to use it, when suddenly he uttered an exclamation, and instantly thrust his fingers beneath the strap that held the express bags to the small saddle, for it occurred to him, with that instinctive feeling that comes over one in danger, that he perhaps had a means of escape in the paper, to which the Chinese, Chopee Stickee, had so slyly attracted his attention.

It was a small slip of paper, and steadying himself in his saddle, while the mad animal dashed on with head far forward and snorting wildly, he saw on it some writing.

It was certainly a very poor specimen of penmanship, and hard indeed to interpret; but, after several efforts, he made out to read as follows:

"Ponee Billee goodee Melican man; savee Chopee Stickee oncee timee from killee; Chopee Stickee savee Billee from killee.

"Horse Devee muchee; but Billee wantee toppee horsee, takee whip and puttee 'tween ear, and horsee toppee quick; wantee horsee follee Billee, Billee whisee."

Having deciphered this curious advice, Buffalo Bill determined to follow it, and instantly thrust the lash of his whip between the ears of the running animal.

The effect was so sudden, that had not the Pony Rider been a perfect horseman he would have been hurled to the ground, for the animal came to a sudden standstill, and with a snort looked around him.

Springing to the ground, for he had faith now in the advice given him by the Chinese, the Pony Rider started to walk away, at the same time whistling to the horse to follow.

With a low neigh the animal obeyed the call, and Buffalo Bill said, in triumphant tones:

"Now, my noble brute, I know the secret of managing you, thanks to that Heathen Chinese.

"Your master has trained you well, and ex-

see which will die first, the Kid Glove Sport, or Buffalo Bill. Come, my beauty, we must go on our right road."

As he spoke he threw himself into the saddle, and at once the horse bounded away, but the touch of the whip between the ears brought him to a standstill once more, and in a minute of time he was thoroughly under the control of his new master, and flying along on the Pony Express trail at a pace that would bring him to the station on time.

Arriving there he told the stock tender to give Red Devil a stall to himself, and to beware of him, and mounting the horse awaiting him, and which was one of Wild Rider's animals, that were trained to run without a bridle, he sped on his way, and reaching the end of his road, started back on the home stretch once more.

What fate had befallen him no one knew at Rocky Glen, and they feared that Wild Rider who was now known to have ridden away on his trail, as if dreading evil to his successor would return with ill tidings of him, and when the time for the coming back of Buffalo Bill drew near, many of the miners and settlers gathered in front of the Rider's Rest.

Presently a horseman appeared in sight; but a second glance showed those who had first thought it was Buffalo Bill or Hewlett Lamdell, that it was neither, but none other than the Kid Glove Sport.

He came on at an easy gallop, mounted on a large roan horse, and dismounting, threw his rein to Chopee Stickee, who came forward to meet him.

"Waal, did yer see ther Pony Rider?" asked Trumps anxiously.

"I am not the keeper of Pony Riders," was the abrupt response.

"No, it would be durned bad fer 'em ef yer was; but Buffalo Bill went off on thet mad beast o' yourn, an' you foller'd soon arter. I had opinion thet yer had gone ter see ef he'd won yer boss from yer."

"I went on other matters that do not concern you, Trumps."

"Waal, we will some day hev some leetle biz together, Kid Gloves, or I are a liar."

"Whenever you see fit, miner," was the indifferent answer, and angered by it, Trumps was about to make some savage retort, when a cheer broke from the crowd, and Buffalo Bill dashed into sight, and that he was riding Red Devil, all saw at a glance.

A muttered curse issued from the lips of the Kid Glove Sport, while, amid wild huzzas the Pony Rider dashed up to the door, brought his bridleless horse to a sudden halt, and springing to the ground, was followed to the hotel steps by the now thoroughly broken animal.

"Well, Kid Gloves, I have won the horse," said Buffalo Bill, and a ringing cheer went up from the crowd, at the Pony Rider's triumph and the gambler's defeat.

CHAPTER XIII.

ENTRAPPED.

"YES, you have won him fairly, and the horse is yours; but, how you tamed him I do not know," and the Kid Glove Sport stepped up to Red Devil, which Chopee Stickee was caressing affectionately.

But, as he laid his hand upon his mane his quick ear seemed to detect some sound in the distance, and turning he made a remark in a low tone to the Chinese and remounting his own horse he rode away.

"Thet man are as oneasy as a wolf in a circus tent," remarked Trumps, and he walked around toward the stables and beckoned to Buffalo Bill to follow him.

"Didn't see nuthin' wrong did ye, Bill?" he asked, as the two halted near the shed.

"How do you mean, Trumps?"

"Didn't see Kid Gloves on yer trail arter yer left?"

"No, but the stock-tender when I left Red Devil, told me he had been there and asked about me, and was mad as a hornet when he beard his horse had not killed me."

"Don't blame him, fer he trained thet boss

ter kill folks; how in thunder did yer save yer neck, Bill?"

"Oh, I found out that Red Devil was not so bad as he was painted, and he gave me little trouble, when he knew that I understood his little ways; but did you want me for anything, Trumps?"

"Only to say thet I doubts that Kid Gloves ther more I sees of him, an' I are going ter mount my old Grandpap an' see whar in thunder he hes gone now."

"I noticed that he rode off very suddenly, after having just returned from a long trip."

"He did, fer a fact; he went off jist arter ye left and he comed in a leetle afore yer; now he has gone ag'in, an' I brings old Grandpap inter rekesition."

"He'll bear watching, Trumps, I feel assured; if you need me any time, you know you can find me," and Buffalo Bill returned to the hotel, while Trumps entered the stables and led out his horse, which he had named Grandpap.

Somehow the name suited the animal, for he was an ancient-looking beast, never had known the curry-comb, and was as gaunt as a deer-hound, while his mane was white, although he was a dark roan.

Of course Trumps loved his horse, and was always extolling his speed, spirit and powers of endurance, which he could however, get no one else to agree with him in, though there was not one who would not swear that Grandpap could use his heels with the dexterity of a government mule.

Mounting his antiquated looking though really young animal, Trumps set off at a canter on the trail which Kid Gloves had taken, and was hardly out of sight of Rocky Glen, when he came upon a stage-coach coming along at a slapping pace, but with one horse leading, which, to the miner was proof positive that there had been trouble of some kind.

"Waal, Ben Trotter, I welcomes yer an yer fust hearse through to Rocky Glen, an' ther boys will git yer drunk fer a fact; but what are up?" said Trumps, as Ben Trotter drew rein on a little rise in the road.

"Oh, the Boy Bandit and his band tackled us an' got more then they wanted, owin' ter this heur young stranger; but I must drive on now, so will see yer later, Trumps, an' we'll hev a leetle whisk tergether," answered Ben Trotter, and, as he drove on, the supposed miner by his side called out after him:

"A horseman has charged the bandits back on the road, and you might aid him if you care to."

"Were he a dandy-lookin' feller with kid gloves on?" asked Trumps.

"Yes; but he don't ride nor act like a slouch," answered Ben Trotter.

"It are ther Kid Glove Sport; but what in thunder are he chargin' upon the bandits fer all by hisse'f?"

"I'll jist go on an' see," and Trumps continued on his way at a rapid gallop, and soon came to the spot where lay the dead stage horse.

Then another animal, with saddle and bridle on, lay dead in the road, and next the body of a human being, with a bullet-wound in his forehead.

"His pockets hes been cleaned out fer a fact; I wonder ef ther Kid Glove Sport did it? but whar is ther livin' fellers? them is who I is lookin' fer, ef they isn't too many of them, fer I don't want ter bite off more 'an I kin chew," and Trumps moved cautiously along the trail until other traces of Little Grit's deadly air came in view.

"Thar hes been some scrimmagin' goin' fer a fact, an' ther old hearse had a hard run on it; but whar in thunder are thet durned Kid Glove Sport, thet went so brave at Gold Plume an' his gerloots?"

"He is here, Trumps, my boy, and you are his prisoner."

"I are fer a fact; caught like a eoon in a hole," resignedly answered Trumps, as he saw the face of the Kid Glove Sport over a huge rock, not ten feet away, and his eye glancing along a nisto' barrel that covered his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PASSENGER THAT WAS "CHALKED THROUGH."

THE word *excitement* will not express what prevailed in Rocky Glen, when Ben Trotter rolled up to the Rider's Rest, mounted on the box of what he called the "fust hearse through."

Although one horse was led behind, and the coach and passengers had had a good shaking up by their adventure with the Boy Bandit and his men, Ben Trotter put on considerable style as he came in sight of the tavern, played a few notes on his stage horn, and he was by no means a mean performer, and then cracking his whip until it echoed like a revolver combat, he gathered up the ribbons in his cleverest way, and came up to the stopping-post as though he had no idea of coming to a halt.

But the iron-grays knew Ben, and Ben knew how to drive, and when just in front of the tavern, the horses and coach came to a sudden halt, which would have sent Little Grit, in his disguise, thirty feet ahead had he not also known well the peculiarities of the driver, who had been long noted along the whole Overland line and its branches.

As it was, it pitched the woman in black and the Jew, who sat upon the back seat, into the arms of the youth, who sat on the front, and caused sundry Hebrew maledictions to issue from the inside of the coach, until Judge Hunter threw open the door and bade the passengers welcome to Rocky Glen amid the wild cheers of the citizens, who already had dragged Ben Trotter from his box, and were carrying him into the bar-room on their shoulders.

As if glad to be where danger from bandits would not come, the Jew jumped out in a hurry, and began to excitedly tell his story of the robbery, while Judge Hunter aided the lady in mourning to alight, and invited the young man into the tavern.

"I s'pose I kin git lodgin's here too, pard?" said Little Grit; no one recognizing him in his disguise of a miner, and he having asked Ben Trotter not to make known his secret, as he had disguised himself for a purpose.

"Oh, yes, my friend; I never turn away the sleepy, hungry or thirsty," said the judge, pleasantly, and he ushered the supposed miner into the office where he registered on the book the name of—

"Zip Cole, o' Colorady."

The young man with the sad face, and whose retiring manner and general appearance caused him to seem out of place on the border, wrote in a full, round hand—

"Roy Elmore, —, Virginia."

The judge then registered the name of his lady guest, and it was as she had given it to him, simply:

"Mrs. Moreland, —, New Jersey."

"I guesses she's hed news o' ther decease o' her husbind, out heur in ther mines, an' he's comed ter see ef he are dead, or married ag'in," said a miner, who read her name after it was registered by the judge.

"He'd better be dead, ef he hain't, ef yer speaks ther truth, Ball," remarked another.

"Yas, fer though she keeps her face kivered I seen her optics, an' thar were blood in her eyes; I is raal glad I were never so weak as ter git married."

"Waal, I married, I did, an' married a widdy too, and that are ther reason I are out heur, fer she made it hot fer me ter hum, you kin gamble on it fer a fact."

While these worthies were talking at the office counter, they were missing the story of the robbery as told by the Jew in the bar-room, whither he had been invited by Bony Bob to tell what had happened.

Elated by the liquor, and unconscious of the presence of Ben Trotter in the saloon, the Jew had told how the bandits had stopped the coach, and allowed it to go on, when he gave the amount demanded; but that a young miner, who was riding inside, had immediately

crawled out the window to the box, and insulted the robbers, who gave chase, and would have overtaken them, had not they been beaten off.

"Did you kill any bandits, sir?" asked a miner.

"I ish kilt several," was the proud response.

"You is a killin' liar from Liar'sville, fer yer was so durned skeert, I 'spected yer would die, and I'd hev ter haul a stiff in on my fust trip through," said Ben Trotter, suddenly facing the discomfited hero, who looked the picture of despair, while Zip Cole o' Colorady, who had sauntered in, and heard the Jew, remarked gravely:

"Ef yer did kill a bandit, I'll bet high thet the gang kills you afore yer levant from these diggin's."

"Te pand kills me?"

"Yes," replied Bony Bob, "they are death on their foes, and they swear to kill all who molest them."

"Holy I-aacs! mine frints, I ish a peace mansh, I ish do not'ings mit goons ant pishtols, ant I don't vant to pe kilt, for I come me here for a leetle pizziness," whined the Jew.

"Yer comed out heur ter take advantage o' some poor miner and buy his lead for nothing, and make a good thing of it all round."

"I knows yer, fer ther boys on the line has chalked yer clean through," said Ben Trotter.

"Chalk me clean through?" queried the Jew.

"Yas; when ther boys knows thar are a shark comin' out ter trade on ther miners, they chalks him along ther line, fer says Bunk Trafford ter me, when he rolled in at ther station I got yer, says he:

"Ben, thar are a Jew Hebrew along as Bent Baker says yer must chalk, fer he hev comed all ther way from Omaha ter buy up ther leads o' ther pards as is unfort'nit."

"Says I ter Bunk, I says:

"Bunk, I will chalk him through, an' now pards, yer kin tell this gentleman thar are no cheap gold mines heur fer sale."

"Durn him, he oughter be stringed up," cried a voice.

"No, let him go back with me, for I knows he hain't goin' ter be pop'lar out heur," remarked Ben.

"No, he's a bad egg, an' we oughter fix him."

"Make cold meat out o' him!"

"H'ist him up to ther tree yonder outside!"

"Don't waste rope; shoot him!"

Such were the angry cries that now went up from the crowd, against the unfortunate Jew who had come to Rocky Glen to speculate on the misfortunes of others, and it was evident that they meant him harm, as there were many reckless spirits present who would commit any crime.

Seeing that he had excited the crowd to wrong-doing, and only intending to frighten the Jew so as to make him leave, Ben Trotter cried out:

"Hold on, pards! yer hasn't a right ter cheat ther comp'ny out o' this heur man's trip money, so I'll jist take him back with me."

"You ish a goot mans, mine frint," said the now terrified man.

"But he hes lied to us like a Injun, Ben, an' he hes got ter hang."

"No, pards, he hes not, I say."

"Waal yer won't save him, Ben."

"Pards, it are my fust trip through, an' I don't want one o' my pilgrims h'isted."

"No use, Ben Trotter; he lied ter us 'bout ther bandit fight, an' he are a shark, so up he goes."

"Not ef I kin help it he don't," and Ben Trotter pushed the Jew behind him.

"Ben, we doesn't want ter hurt you, but we hes got ter hev thet man," said one of the miners, stepping forward.

"Yer knows me, or oughter, an' will ef I drives this road long, an' it hain't no use ter say yer'll take him, onless yer wants 'er fight me," said the driver firmly.

"Waal we does, an' we will," was the determined reply, and weapons were drawn on

both sides, Ben Trotter against the crowd, the Jew never moved, and it only needed a spark to explode the magazine.

CHAPTER XV.

EIGHT REVOLVERS TO THE FRONT.

"PARDS, yer doesn't act squar'; ther man hain't done nothin', an' 'tain't right ter hang him," said Ben Trotter, gazing over the crowd, that had worked itself into a fury, and now considered that the unfortunate Jew had done some great injury to Rocky Glen and its citizens.

"We iss squar', Ben Trotter, and it are our duty ter see thet no dangersome characters don't git inter our town," said the self-appointed leader, and a murmur of approbation answered his words.

But there suddenly glided before this leader a slender form, and a clear voice said:

"Then why don't you go out and fight the Gold Plume and his band?"

"It are none o' yer bisness, Buffalo Bill."

"You are cowards, to wish to hang a poor man who has as yet done you no wrong, and I doubt if he intended to. No, you face no danger in dragging him to death," retorted Buffalo Bill, fearlessly.

"Hold on, Pony Rider, yer has no right ter chip in heur, fer it hain't your funeral," said a burly miner.

"I'll make it *your funeral*, Sands, if you attempt to harm this gentleman," was the prompt retort.

"Does yer hear thet, pards?" and Sands turned to his followers, who nodded assent.

"Yer means *you* is goin' ter pervent us hangin' him?"

"I mean that *you* won't see him hanged if you make the attempt to take him."

Sands saw that Buffalo Bill meant what he said, and he was not anxious to be the object of his particular attention; but he had imposed upon himself the leadership of the mob, and knew he had to carry it out, or his followers would make it too hot for him.

He wanted somebody else to speak; but no one else did speak, and he then said:

"Bill Cody, I knows yer fer game clean through, an' I guess yer knows me too."

"Yes, for a contemptible coward, Sands," was the quick retort.

The man attempted to level his revolver, but instantly the Pony Rider had him covered, while he said with a smile:

"You don't practice getting the drop on a fellow, Sands, as much as I do, and if you move I'll show your pards that I can hit the dead center, for *you* won't know anything about it."

"Another time, Pony Rider, we'll try this atween us; but now, pards, let us do our duty," cried Sands, and the crowd made a movement forward, but suddenly stopped, as two other forms sprung to the side of Buffalo Bill, and they found themselves confronting eight leveled revolvers.

Those eight were held by four men, one in each hand, and the four were, besides Ben Trotter, and Buffalo Bill, Bony Bob and the young miner, who had registered as Zip Cole o' Colorady.

The latter, as he sprung to the side of Buffalo Bill, and faced the crowd, said quietly:

"Pards, don't crowd ther mourners, or thar will be howlin' in this camp meetin'."

"Who ther devil are you?" asked Sands, willing to switch off on another tack, as he saw that in spite of the large crowd that backed him, the four men in their front held them at bay.

"He are a pilgrim as come over with me on my fust trip through, pards, an' I seen him drop bandits a durned long way off, so yer better not crowd him, I kin sw'ar," said Ben Trotter.

"We doesn't skeer worth a cent," growled Sands in reply.

"Yer standin' thar proves yer a liar; but I advise yer ter let up jist heur an' take a drink all round with ther Jew," said Zip Cole o' Colorady, whose disguise not one penetrated.

"Yer better say yer'll stand treat, Jew

pard, an' take ther hearse back in ther mornin'." whispered Ben Trotter to the trembling man he was protecting.

"Yesh, gintlemens, I ish glat to drink mit sooch nice gintlemens," said the Jew eagerly, and glad of a compromise Sands responded:

"All right, pard, ef he will treat all round, and take ther trip out with Ben, we is willin', I guesses."

Glad to escape so easily the Jew "treated all round" several times, and the result was that many of his former foes got drunk and became his friends, and seeing what it would result in, Buffalo Bill called him aside, and said:

"My friend, you are on the straight road to be banged, for whisky friends always renew an old quarrel when the liquor's in, and they will soon turn on you, and—"

"I ish understand, mine frint; vere shall I go?" said the alarmed man.

"Come with me, and my advice to you is not to leave the hotel while you remain in Rocky Glen, for men on the border don't like those who speculate on their misfortunes."

Eagerly the Hebrew left the saloon with Buffalo Bill; and not an instant too soon, for already Sands was beginning to foment trouble against him once more, when he saw that those who had protected him had gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRACKED.

"YOUR name is Greyson Benton, I believe?"

"Ha! who the devil are you that has that name so glibly on your lips?" and the Kid Glove Sport turned quickly toward the one who had addressed him as he dismounted from his horse, several hours after his gallant charge single handed upon the bandits who were pursuing the stage-coach.

"We have met before, sir, and I came to this far-away land only to see you," was the quiet reply, though the voice quivered slightly.

The speaker was the sad-faced youth whom Gold Plume had refused to rob, and had offered the money to which he had taken from the Jew.

Since his arrival he had been wandering with apparent listlessness about, but into each face he saw, he had looked with a searching glance, until at last he beheld the Kid Glove Sport coming at an easy gallop toward the hotel.

"Yes, it is he whom I seek; at last we meet again," he said in suppressed tones, and at once walked toward the hotel stables whither the gambler was going.

For a wonder Chopee Stickee was not there to take Gambler Grey's horse, and, as he started to care for him himself, he had been addressed by the youth.

"And I ask who the devil are you?" said the Kid Glove Sport with some show of anger.

"If you will take a walk with me you shall now."

"Ha! you are mysterious, young sir, for in a jite of the way you try to hide your face I see that you are youthful."

"I have that to say to you which I care not to have other ears hear."

"Ah! then come to my room in the hotel."

"No, for walls have ears; do you fear to accompany a beardless boy?"

"No, I fear no man living."

"Or woman?"

"Boy you are insolent; what do you wish, and where have we met before?"

"Come with me and you shall know."

"All right, lead on; but mind you, no treachery, or I will knife you as I would a cur that tried to bite me."

"I do not doubt it, for I know you," and with a scornful laugh the youth led the way from the stables, by a path that skirted through the edge of the timber round to the Pony Express and Overland stage road.

"I have seen him before, and his voice has a familiar ring to my ears, where though, I know not, until I see his face," muttered the Kid Glove Sport.

Leading the way the youth at last stopped within a clump of bushes, and turning said abruptly:

"Well, sir, you ask who I am, and what I wish with you, and my answer is that I am here to avenge Celine Duncan!"

The man started back with a half cry, but as the youth spoke he had drawn a long-bladed dirk from his sleeve, and springing forward drove it with full force at the heart of the Kid Glove Sport.

But, a metallic sound echoed back the blow, and the blade was shivered, for it struck a shirt of steel the gambler wore beneath his outer clothing.

"Ha! ha! ha! my boy, did you expect to catch Grey Benton in that way?" and with a gripe the youth could not resist he seized his arms in his strong hands, and looked into the white, quivering face now upturned to him.

"Great God! do the dead come back to life?" he cried, while his cruel face became livid.

"Yes, you are Celine Duncan," he muttered, after an instant.

"Yes, I am Celine Duncan that was, and whom you believed you had killed; but no, Greyson Benton, your poison did not kill, and the one you hired to bury me had heart enough not to do the work, when he found I lived, though he took your money and buried my coffin instead."

"You thought to kill me, that you might marry Clotilde Leroy, and you were baffled, for already had her parents forced her to become the wife of another man. Your crimes forced you to fly here, to these wilds for shelter, and where you thought no one would ever trace you! but see, I have done so, ay, though I had to work as a slave to get money to hunt you down."

"And what good has it done you?" was the indifferent question.

"You shall see, for every one here shall know who and what you are."

"They will never know through you, Celine."

"They will!"

"I say they will not."

"And I say they shall, for I will tell them."

"No, you will never tell them."

"I shall; and more—I shall even revel in the reward offered for you."

"Fool! I believed I took your life once, and it has never troubled my conscience, so I will do so now."

"No, no, you will not do that?" she cried, now thoroughly alarmed at his manner.

"Yes, I will, and now!"

She tried to cry out, but he held his hand over her mouth, though she bit and tore it with her nails, in her struggle to release it, while he drew his knife from his belt.

"Now, girl, you shall die for tracking me here!" he said, savagely:

"Girlee no die; killee bad Melican man first," said a voice in his ear, and a second time a knife descended upon him, to be again shattered on his steel shirt.

But the sudden coming of Chopee Stickee caused him to release the girl, and she bounded away, while he seized the Chinaman.

"Girl, you shall not escape," he cried, savagely, and ere she had gone ten paces a revolver cracked, and with a stifled cry she sunk in her tracks.

"Now, accursed Chinnee, it is your turn," and he turned upon the poor Chinaman, whom his superior strength enabled him to hold on to.

Seeing that his master meant to kill him, Chopee Stickee tried to cry out for help, and struggled fiercely; but a stunning blow in the face dazed him, and the next instant a knife blade was thrust between his ribs, while the murderer of a woman and the one who would have saved her, bounded away through the timber like a deer, leaving his victims where they had fallen.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOLD PLUME MAKES A DISCOVERY.

As affairs at Rocky Glen and the other Pony Express stations were not working with perfect smoothness, after the raid of the Bandits upon the line, Buffalo Bill and several other of the riders were expected to do double duty for a few days, and consequently he was to start out again before sunset for his eighty-six-mile run.

Mounted upon Red Devil, he left the town on time, and as usual was sent off with a cheer from the crowd there assembled, and soon disappeared around a curve in the road, to suddenly lay his whip between the ears of his horse and bring him to a dead halt.

The cause of this abrupt stop was at discerning a human form lying a few feet from the trail, apparently dead.

Dismounting, he ran to it, and bending over, an exclamation of surprise burst from his lips, and he cried:

"By Heaven! it is the youth whom Ben Trotter brought over this morning, and—Holy Rockies! there lies Chopee Stickee, the Chinnee!"

"I will return and report this murder; for they certainly have been murdered. Ha! the youth clutches a part of a kid glove in his hand; this looks suspicious," and taking the remnant of the glove, he at once started toward the horse; but that animal seemed a little alarmed at his hasty approach and bounded out of reach.

Endeavoring to catch him Buffalo Bill followed slowly, yet the horse kept on down the trail, just out of his reach, and thus it continued, the rider coaxing his truant steed, but all to no purpose.

"If you did not have the Express bags, you might go back to your accursed dominions, you brute," he said savagely, after Red Devil had led him a couple of miles on the road toward the next station.

But the horse did carry the Express and he kept straight on, not twenty feet ahead of the rider, and unmindful of coaxings and cursings.

"Oh! if I had a lariat, I'd fetch you to terms," cried Buffalo Bill, and seemingly fearing that his master did have something of the kind, Red Devil put double the distance between them.

"Oh! Eternal Sierras! there is the half-way rock, and I'll have to walk all the way."

"No! this has gone far enough, and I must end it before it gets too dark, and I will!"

As he spoke there came over his face a look of determination that it was wont to wear only when deeply moved, and dropping his hand on his hip he drew a revolver, and the flash and report almost instantly followed.

A wild sport, a bound into the air, and Red Devil's life had ended.

Running up to him, Buffalo Bill unstrapped his saddle, and muttered:

"Your former master will soon follow you, Red Devil, or I greatly mistake my reckoning; now for an eight mile trot to the next station, for I cannot return to Rocky Glen now."

Throwing the light saddle and Express bags across his back he started at a jog trot toward the next station, and arriving there within little over an hour, he mounted a horse in waiting for him, told the stock tender the fate of Red Devil, and sped swiftly on his way, determined to make up the time he had lost.

Though Buffalo Bill regretted, that on account of Red Devil's shabby trick, he was unable to return and report the tragedy that had been enacted in the timber near Rocky Glen, and bemoaned that the bodies would have to lie all night exposed to the prowling wolves, he little knew that there had been a pair of eyes upon him when he had sprung from his horse.

The person who was thus watching him, had been coming slowly up the trail, mounted upon a white horse, and though it was a strange place for one to go, upon whose head a price was set, it was none other than Gold Plume, the Boy Bandit.

Hearing the clatter of the Pony Rider's

roofs, Gold Plume had quickly turned into a clump of small pines, and drawing his revolver, awaited the issue, if discovered.

Seeing Buffalo Bill halt suddenly, go quickly into the timber by the side of the trail, and the result that followed, Gold Plume, as soon as Red Devil had led his rider from sight, rode from his ambush, and suddenly came upon the sickening sight that had met the gaze of the Pony Rider.

"Good God! it is the youth that was in the stage-coach, and yonder lies that cunning Chinese! What can it mean? Ha! here are pieces of two broken knives, and, as I live! *this is a woman!*"

Bending over the prostrate form, Gold Plume thrust his hand into the jacket pockets, and drew out a leathern wallet upon which was a name that caused him to turn deadly pale.

Instantly he began a thorough search of the body, and then went to that of the Chinese, and what he found on both seemed to move him deeply.

Thrusting what he had taken from the dead into his own pockets, he sprung upon his waiting horse, and with the speed of a whirlwind went back down the trail, his eyes burning, his lips set, and his face livid.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK.

I WILL now return to the woman in deep mourning, and who was a passenger in the stage-coach with the supposed youth, but who the reader now knows was a young girl.

What had brought the woman in black, as the denizens of Rocky Glen had quickly named her, to that wild land none could surmise; but certain it is, that her face having been kept from general observation, many a miner's heart trembled with fear that she might have some intention regarding him, for not all there had by any means led saintly lives in the past.

Of her intentions the woman said nothing, but having become rested after her journey asked Judge Hunter to request for her an interview with Colonel Hewlett, which was at once granted.

With her face still concealed she entered the colonel's quarters, and observing Helen and Bessie, said in a commanding tone:

"I asked for a private interview, sir."

"And you shall have one, madame," but the maidens had already arisen, for they liked not the tone of the woman, and hastily retired, Helen with an angry flush on her face.

"Now, madam, pray tell me whom I have the honor of addressing and of what service I can be," said the colonel, curtly.

"I am registered, sir, as Mrs. Moreland, and I have come West to see you."

"Indeed may I ask you to be seated, and then inquire the nature of the business that has brought you so far into the Western wilds?"

The woman sunk into a chair and said in a tone that was suppressed, and evidently with deep feeling:

"I have but one purpose in life, Hadley Hewlett."

"Ah! you then know me?" asked the colonel, in surprise.

"Alas! yes; would I come to this heathenish place did I not know you? ay, and you shall know me, and my errand you can guess."

As she spoke she arose and threw back her hair.

The act caused the officer to spring to his feet with a cry upon his lips, and lean heavily upon the back of his chair, as though for support, while his face became deadly pale, and a strange look came into his eyes as he gazed upon the face before him.

It was a face that had passed the usual term of beautiful womanhood, and yet it was strangely beautiful, for every feature was perfect, and the complexion was marble-like in its purity.

The teeth were perfect, as the half-opened lips revealed, and the burning eyes were large and full of intense passion.

And yet, upon the face of the woman rested a look that showed evil had left its impress there.

"You know me now, Hadley Hewlett?" she said, in a metallic-like voice.

"Ay, do I, Corinne Lamdell, know you; yes, know you as the one who proved false to your vows to me in the long ago, and caused me to stain my hands with the life of Lester Lamdell," and the colonel seemed deeply moved.

"Yes, you took his life; you tracked him to his death and avenged yourself upon both of us."

"Why recall that scene now, Corinne? Is it not enough that it is true, and that ever here I bear the remembrance, never to be obliterated?" and he placed his hand over his heart.

"You do not enjoy the revenge you gained?" she asked, with a sneer.

"Let us not speak of the past, but tell me why you come hither to seek me?"

"Because I have wronged you."

"That I well know; but I forgave you with the act that took the life of Lester Lamdell."

"You forgave me, Hadley?"

"Yes."

"I do not believe it."

"I tell you the truth; I forgave you, and when I learned that you were dead, not one unkind memory held I against you."

"Oh! that I could believe this, Hadley Hewlett."

"It is the truth, Corinne, though God knows you wrecked the fond aspirations of my earlier years; but to him, more than to you I lay the charge—"

"Hold! he lies in his grave, and I live; let me bear the blame."

"And, Hadley Hewlett, I know well that I wronged you, and I hated you, oh so bitterly, I can never reveal, and my hatred was so intense that I reared one up to take your life."

"That one was my boy; his son, and mine, and—"

"I know all, Corinne—"

"No you do not know all; you heard that I was dead."

"It was false, for it was a scheme of mine to get away from the world, and to watch in retirement his career, my boy's, and how he kept his oath to me, for upon its fulfillment rested his future."

"And in that retirement, Hadley Hewlett, I came back from the trance I seemed to live in; I awoke from that fearful dream of hatred, and bitter remorse seized upon me for allowing myself to have been reported as among the massacred in that train that the Indians attacked."

"I awoke, and I sought my boy; I did not find him, but I discovered that he was on the trail of the one he had been told to kill."

"I could not find him, and so I have come to you, for I know that one day he must find you, and then my hand shall stay his intent, for my own sorrows, my own remorse, Hadley Hewlett, have avenged me."

"Here I am now before you, and, knowing that my husband and myself deeply wronged you, and that you were but human in seeking revenge on Lester Lamdell, I have come to ask you to forgive, if not forget the past, and leave to your guardianship my boy and his wealth, when I have seen him, and relieved him from the oath I have placed upon his young life."

"See, Hadley, I am a suppliant at your feet for forgiveness."

As the woman spoke she dropped on her knees before Colonel Hewlett, who, deeply moved, sprung forward and raised her up, while he said in a voice that trembled:

"Corinne, I forgive the past, as freely as you forgive me the taking of Lester Lamdell's life; and, as for your son, I feel no fear of him, for, from his own lips I have heard all."

"You have heard all, and from my son?"

"Yes," and Colonel Hewlett told of his interview with the Pony Rider, who had overheard his story to his daughter, and that he was then

an aide upon his staff, but absent upon some secret duty.

"God, I thank Thee for this," cried the poor mother, and she burst into tears, the first she had shed for many long and weary years.

"Calm yourself, Corinne, and remember that from this day we are friends, and we will strive not to see the grim shadow that stands between us."

"To Helen, my daughter, I will tell who you are, and she will treat you as her father would have her."

"Remain here, and Hewlett will soon return, and then in his love you can be happy, for he is a brave, noble youth, and will make a man that any woman will be proud to call her son."

"I will do as you say, Hadley; now let the past go back into the shadow, for I have shined in my bitter hate, I have suffered deepest sorrow, and the clouds have a silver lining to them, and no longer cast gloom into the depths of my poor heart."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT THE MINERS DISCOVERED.

WHEN Ben Trotter mounted his stage box to start on the back trip the following morning, he was as calm and unruffled as though he had met with no adventures on the run into Rocky Glen, and had afterward passed half the night in gambling and drinking.

In the place of the dead iron-gray he had a black animal of the pony stables, which Buffalo Bill had loaned him, and Ben said, as he took his reins in hand:

"Jedge, thet beast thinks he's goin' ter carry express, an' he'll run ther whole durned road ef I let him."

"He'll not lag back, Ben, I am certain; but hello! my man, are you not going to remain with us?" and Judge Hunter turned to the miner, who had arrived the day before, and registered as Zip Cole of Colorado.

"No, jedge; I has paid up my leetle diffy to yer book pilot inside, for I winned a leetle duckits last night, an' I intends to levant out o' these diggin's," replied the supposed miner.

"We were in hopes you were going to take up your habitation among us, Mr. Cole."

"No, jedge, I don't habitate heur, and yer hopes wrong, for this are a onhealthy community, and I hed rather git leetle elsewhere an' live, than git heaps heur an' die."

"Ther Jew are inside the hearse I sees, an' I intends ter be a inside passenger with him."

"Yesh, mine frint, I ish goings away too; it ish petter dat I does," remarked the Jew, who was already on the back seat.

"Ther gloomy lady an' ther youngster doesn't seem ter be going though," remarked Ben.

"No, Mrs. Moreland, is, I find, a friend of the colonel's and remains, Ben; but who has seen that youth since his arrival, for I have not?" said Judge Hunter.

A chorus of voices now expressed surprise at the youth, who had signed himself Roy Elmore, not having been seen by any one since just after his arrival, and the judge was beginning to feel anxious regarding him, when several miners, who had started to work some time before, were discovered coming toward the inn bearing something in their arms.

It was just time for the stage to start, but Ben Trotter, from his lofty perch, instead of calling to his horses, cried:

"By Hokey! thar's the boy now, an' ef he hain't dead, then I am a liar."

All eyes turned upon the approaching miners, five in number, and saw that four of them were bearing upon poles, swung between them, two human forms.

"It are the heathen too!" cried a voice.

"Thar's been hell ter split out thar," said another.

But, before more comments could be made the small party approached and laid down their ghastly load before the tavern door, while one said:

"Jedge, we was a-goin' out to ther mines an' seein' some coyotes snarlin' in ther thickets."

went thar, an' these are what we found, so we fetched 'em in."

"The youth, Elmore, and Chopee Stickee," cried the judge excitedly.

"Yes, jedge, an' dead as rocks, an' heur yer sees ther cause; a bullet in ther boy's back, an' a knife cut in ther Chinees."

"Could it be possible they had a fight?"

"Ther life hain't in 'em to speak for themselves, jedge: we found 'em yonder in ther thicket on ther Pony trail, an' they hes been thar for some time; afore ther dew fallen last night, fer ther leaves under 'em were not damp; but it's my reasonin' they didn't kill each other, fer ther boy's pockets were turned inside out, an' so were ther Chinees's, as yer sees, an' if they robbed each other, which one did it an' whar are ther things they tuk?"

This quaint, but true style of reasoning seemed conclusive to all that some one else had done the deed, and that it had not been a fight to the death between the strange youth and the Chinees.

But, in the midst of the talk as to who could clear up the mystery, Ben Trotter called out:

"Waal, pards, clear it up ter suit yerselves; but ef things hain't regilated in Rocky Glen, ther biz o' ther place will play out, instead o' rise, as it's doing now."

"Good-by, all! all aboard! Git!"

The last was to the horses, and away rolled the stage-coach, followed by a cheer from the miners, and within sat but two passengers—the disguised Little Grit and the Jew.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LYNCHERS AT WORK.

ENE the new stage-coach, with the proud Ben Trotter on the box, had gone two miles, it came to a halt.

The cause this time was not road-agents under the renowned Boy Bandit, but a body of miners, half a dozen in number, who signaled to the driver to stop.

Recognizing some whom he had seen at Rocky Glen the night before, Ben Trotter unhesitatingly drew rein, while he called out cheerily:

"Does yer want a ride, pards, or is thar agents ahead?"

Instantly the leaders of the team were seized by two men, and four revolvers covered the unsuspecting Ben, while one said sternly:

"We means you no harm, Ben Trotter; but yer has a pilgrim in ther hearse as we is layin' fer."

"Who does yer want, pards?" asked Ben quietly.

"We wants ther Jew, an' more is we is goin' ter have him," was the determined reply, while from within the coach came the mournful cry:

"Holy Isaacs! I ish a kilt Israelite."

"Don't you be so sartin, Jew, fer ther comp'ny hires me ter drive stage an' perreck ther passengers an' I is goin' ter make a fight ef these gerloots says they wants yer; only git yer back up an' help me," was the firm response of Ben.

"Look heur, Ben, we wants that Hebrew Jew; he are ther same as bought poor Binny Burt's lead some year ago in Colorady, an' made a fortin' out o' it, while Binny kilt hisself, an' we knows of other leetle games he hes played on ther boys, an' it 'tain't no use, he's got ter swing fer it."

"I says guess not, pards, though yer does hold ther drop on me."

"We don't want ter kill you, Ben, but we'll do it, an' then swing Hebrew, and 'twill be said ther agents did it," said the leader of the gang of lynchors.

"Thar is another pilgrim inside ther hearse, pards, yer will hev ter make a stiff of two."

"Who are he, Ben?" asked one.

"I are called Zip Cole o' Colorady, gerloots," said a voice, and the visage of the disguised Pony Rider was seen in the window of the coach; but the eyes squinted along two revol-

vers, and each man of the four seemed to feel that a weapon covered him.

"Ther devill yer don't mean ter say yer w'ud tackle this heur party?" said the leader.

"Nary, I'd rather not," was the cool response.

"Then what in thunder does yer p'int them weepins at us fer?"

"Cause I don't want yer ter 'tack me."

"We does not want you."

"Ther Jew are my friend."

"He are our enemy."

"Waal, ef yer hates more than I loves him, gents, jist cross over an' swing yer partners," was the provokingly insolent reply.

"Pards, we has ter use strategy heur; you, Lucky Tom, keep yer weepin on Ben, while you, Dandy, go round to t'other window an' see ef we can't change the tune fer ther dance," said the leader.

It was evident that numbers in this case held the advantage, for Ben Trotter, with reins and whip in hand, was under the aim of a red-whiskered fellow, known as Lucky Tom in the mines, and he dare not move to draw a weapon, while it would be impossible for Zip Cole of Colorado to guard both sides, and the Jew, shivering with fright on the back seat was next to useless to offer the slightest resistance even in his own behalf.

By the determined look on the face of both Ben Trotter and the disguised Pony Rider, it was evident too, that they were watching their chances to take advantage of the slightest movement in their favor, and would fight for the Jew even against the odds of three to one, be the result what it might.

But, just as matters looked as though a storm would break in a second, there came the rapid clatter of hoofs, and up to the spot dashed Buffalo Bill, his horse covered with foam, and riding like the wind.

"Hello, Ben! what's up?" he cried in his light-hearted way, at the same time bringing his horse to a sudden halt, and drawing a revolver in each hand.

"Got a pilgrim heur, Buffalo Bill, ther boys don't like, an' tharfore they wants ter hang him; but I says no, an' ther miner inside backs me up, and it's about ter be nip an' tuck fur Israel, with the chances ag'in' nip," was Ben's characteristic explanation.

"You being nip, Ben, I side with you, and say right out no Jew gets h'isted this day in these parts," was the decided retort of the Pony Rider.

"Better not interfere heur, Buff'ler Bill," said the leader in a tone of menace.

"Why not?"

"I says no, an' ef yer does, yer will never ride Express ag'in."

"You are a liar, and I'll prove it."

"How?"

"You threaten to take my life?"

"I does, ef yer chips in."

"You'll never do it, old man."

"I'll do it now, youngster, fer—"

He never finished the sentence, for, as he uttered the last word he made a motion to raise his weapon, and quicker than a flash of light he was shot dead in his tracks, for Buffalo Bill's aim was deadly, and his movements rapid.

Seeming to see at a glance who else was hostile to him, a second time his pistol flashed and another of the lynchors went down, just as Zip Cole of Colorado opened the stage door and sprung out, pistol in hand, and, with a yell to his horses Ben Trotter made them spring forward, dragging the man who was holding them off his feet.

"Hold, pards, yer holds ther winning cards," cried one of the lynchors, as they saw that the sudden act of Buffalo Bill had turned the tables upon them.

"Yas, we does hold ther keards ter win, yer cowardly gerloots, an' I'll report yer at ther road stations, as foelin' with my inside pilgrims, an' woe be unter yer, pards, says I; git! or I'll ask Buffalo Bill an' Zip heur ter fill yer full o' holes, an' then I'll drive over yer

a few times so yer'll make good book-marks fer yer friends ter tally off thar readin' with," and Ben's suggestion to "git" was acted upon with alacrity, while with a light laugh, and unmindful of the thanks of the delighted Jew, Buffalo Bill swept on at a speed to make up for two or three minutes he had lost by the delay, and good service he had rendered.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PONY RIDER'S THREAT.

THE finding of the two bodies near Rocky Glen caused intense excitement among the denizens of that wild settlement, and especially did the circumstance cause comment, when it was discovered that one was a woman, and that the name on the book of the tavern was a false one.

Who the unfortunate girl was none knew, nor why she had come to Rocky Glen.

And why she, in her disguise of a youth, had been killed, along with poor Chopee Stickee, the harmless and innocent Chinees, was something that puzzled miners, soldiers and all the more it was commented upon.

At last, in the midst of the discussion, upon the pros and cons of the case, Buffalo Bill dashed up and was greeted with a shout of welcome, and finding the cause of the excitement, he told of his discovery the evening before, and of the shabby trick of his horse, which prevented his returning and reporting the circumstance.

But of his finding a piece of white kid glove, evidently torn from the hand of the Kid Glove Sport he did not speak, evidently determined to work up any clew he had as to the murderer, or murderers, in his own way.

After breakfast Buffalo sought his little room for a rest, and it was late in the afternoon when he awoke.

Seeking the free-and-easy saloon he found it crowded with the denizens of Rocky Glen, all still excitedly discussing the murder, and further off than ever regarding a solution of the mystery, for the thought was gaining ground that it had been perpetrated by some of the band of the Gold Plume.

"I feel confident some of the Boy Bandit's bearing band have ventured near and surprised the youth and killed him," remarked the Kid Glove Sport, who had arrived on horseback a couple of hours before.

"But the Chinees, sir; do you think he was killed by the Boy Bandit's men?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Why who else could have done it?"

"Why were the girl and the Chinees together, sir?"

"How can I tell, Cody? He was a friendless youth—"

"He was a woman, Kid Gloves."

"Ah yes, I forgot: they told me he, I mean she, was dressed as a boy; I say she was friendless, and doubtless sought the companionship of my Chinees servant, and were surprised."

"At any rate, I am not sorry to have gotten rid of that cunning and worthless Chinees, and as for the girl, she was doubtless intending mischief under disguise."

"I do not agree with you, Gambler Grey, for I believe she took that guise to hunt down some villain who had wronged her," and Buffalo Bill looked squarely in the face of the gambler, who, without the slightest change of color said indifferently:

"As you please to think, Cody, of course, for we all seem to have different theories; but as to myself, I care not who or what she was, and death is too common an occurrence out here to startle me."

"Well, Grey, I have my opinion who did the deed, and, as you are a betting man, I will wager you six months of my pay that I hunt down the murderer."

"Done! say before witnesses that you will not draw a dollar from the company for six months, and I'll stake the amount in the hands of Judge Hunter."

"So be it; here is the judg' and I say so

before him," and the bet was made, the gambler putting up the cash against Buffalo Bill's coming Express Rider's pay for the following six months.

"Now, who can tell me where Little Grit is, or rather Lieutenant Lamdell?" asked the gambler.

"You are anxious about him, it seems," said Buffalo Bill, with a sneer.

"Yes, he is so reckless that when he is absent, I always fear he may have had some harm befall him."

"You are awfully considerate, Grey; but have you any idea of where Trumps has gone? for no one has seen him since last night."

"No, Cody; I heard Trotter say that he followed me, in my run after the Boy Bandit and his men, in their attack on the coach, but I never saw him; has he not returned?"

"No one has seen him if he has; but if the Boy Bandit has got Little Grit and Trumps, I'll get leave from the company, and run that gang to earth, if I have to go alone."

"You won't have to do that, Buffalo Bill," remarked Bony Bob, while a number of others present cried out that they would volunteer any time to hunt down Gold Plume and his men.

"Well, boys, if Little Grit and Trumps do not turn up by the time I get back, we'll raid Gold Plume and his gang; now time's up, and I must be off," and five minutes after making his threat, that boded no good to the road-agents, Buffalo Bill was flying along on his run with the express.

CHAPTER XXII.

GOLD PLUME'S CAPTIVE.

THE morning came bright and balmy the day following, after the finding of the disguised girl and poor Chopee Sticke in the thicket, and in a lovely vale not far distant from the settlement the two were buried.

A large number of the Rocky Glenites followed the two bodies to their last resting-place, and also Colonel Hewlett and his daughter went, accompanied by Bessie Benton, the stock-tender's daughter, and who was sorrowing deeply for the loss of her father and the continued absence of her lover, Little Grit.

The fort chaplain read the service of the dead for heathen and Christian alike, the graves were filled in, and back to the settlement went all who had witnessed the sad ceremony.

No, not all, for one remained.

And that one was Bessie Benton, who, wishing to remain and brood alone over her sorrows, by the grave of the two unfortunates, had separated herself from the others, and unseen had quickly returned to the lonely yet beautiful spot where slept the dead.

Leaning against a tree, through the branches of which the wind sighed a doleful requiem for those who slept beneath its shadows, she burst into tears, and cried:

"Oh father! father! what has been your fate, and will I never see you more?"

"Yes."

She started with a cry, half of fear, half of joy, for she believed that her father stood before her.

But no; his well-known form met not her gaze.

And yet there was one before her, and one glance into his face and at his slight form, told her who he was.

It was the Boy Bandit, Gold Plume, in whose presence she stood, and his eyes were fastened upon her with a peculiar look.

He was dressed in the same fanciful way before described to the reader, and behind him, a score of paces, Bessie saw his splendid horse quietly and patiently awaiting him.

It was evident that, in spite of the rewards offered for his head, and the danger attending his proximity to the settlement, he had ventured near, and doubtless had seen the burial ceremony from a distance.

So silently had he approached her that she

suspected not his presence until his affirmative reply to her question.

"Well, sir, do you value your life so little that you come here, within hail of the settlement?" she asked, determined to put a bold front upon the meeting.

"What matters my life to you, maiden, and what is it worth to me, that I should dread to lose it, were it not for the excitement attendant upon self-protection?" was the strange response.

"You are Gold Plume, the Boy Bandit?" she asked, though she knew well who he was.

"So I am called, with also the name of Captain Firebrand, Satan's Cub, and half a dozen other appellations," he replied with a sneer and a smile combined:

"There is a price set upon your head!"

"Yes, dead or alive, I believe; in fact I know, for I have read the notices posted up by the Vigilantes."

"And you come where I can, in an instant, earn that reward?"

He laughed lightly, and Bessie liked not the laugh; but he said:

"You would not touch one dollar of blood money, and you know it; no, no, I am in no danger here, for your friends are beyond hail, and did any one approach I could throw myself upon my horse and dash away like the wind, defying all pursuit."

"You are too confident."

"Oh, no; but this is not a healthy locality for me, as men would say, so let us come to business, for I come to the vicinity of Rocky Glen to seek you."

"Seek me?" asked Bessie in surprise she could not conceal.

"Oh, yes; you love your father, I believe?"

"Oh, sir! tell me what you know of my father?" cried the stock-tender's daughter earnestly.

"He is my prisoner."

"He is not dead then?" she eagerly exclaimed.

"No."

"Thank God!"

"You believed him dead?"

"Yes."

"You are mistaken."

"Then where is he?"

"Safe and well in my stronghold."

"Thank God! again I say it, for it is joy to know that he is not dead."

"It depends upon you whether he dies or lives."

"Upon me?"

"Yes."

"Oh tell me how I can save him."

"And you will?"

"Yes."

"It will be a great sacrifice."

"I care not."

"You will make it?"

"Yes."

"I shall hold you to your word."

"So be it; I will do as I say."

"You are aware that your father has a mine that has paid him largely."

"Yes, so I have lately learned."

"He preferred death to revealing where his gold was, saying it was for you."

"Noble father."

"But I let him live on, and to save him I seek you."

"Go on."

"If you tell where that gold is your father shall be released."

"I know not."

"Take care!"

"I know not, upon my honor?"

"There is one who does."

"Who?"

"Little Grit, men call him."

"Well?"

"Where is he?"

"I do not know, for he has been absent some time from the Glen."

"Then you must go to your father, bid him tell where his gold lies, and then you and he shall go free."

"Gladly would I give up all I hope to get if he could go free."

"He shall, if you go with me."

"Ah me! I know not what to say or do."

"Go with me."

"And you will release my father?"

"When you make him tell the secret of his mine."

"And no harm shall befall me?"

"Not if I get the treasure."

"I will go," she said firmly.

"You are wise; here, mount behind me."

He sprung upon his horse as he spoke, extended his hand and drew her to a seat back of his saddle, and his noble horse started off at a gallop, little caring for his double load.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEN'S SECOND TRIP TO THE GLEN.

THE news of Ben Trotter's adventures on his first run through with the stage-coach having spread through the settlement, which was the starting-point of the branch running out to Rocky Glen, a large and motley crowd assembled to see him off on his second trip.

And Ben was as proud as a peacock, and seemed to fear nothing, although his coach contained only a party of women, bound, it was said, out to Rocky Glen to look up their husbands.

They were a queer set, seven in number, and from the fat old matron to the lean shrew, with but one handsome face in the lot.

"That's ther gal as catches on ter my optic, an' she rides with me, you bet, ter view ther kentry," said Ben, with a wink to one of his intimates, just before he mounted the box.

"What in thunder is ther goin' ter do up at ther Glen, Ben?" asked a miner.

"Raise 'tarnal thunder; out-chin an' out-sass all creation; tell more lies in a single tea-sippin' then thar is prayers in ther Testimint, an' make more mischief among the husbands as don't b'long to 'em than anybody would believe."

"I tell yer, pards, thar will be — let loose afo'e breakfast, an' no pitch hot, when I lands thet tea-party in Rocky Glen."

"But does yer think ther Gold Plume will let yer slide through with thet plunder?" asked one, looking contemptuously at the curious faces peering out of the coach-window, to see why the start was not made.

"Lordy bless yer, pards, I'd pay ther Gold Plume ter tackle this heur load o' she-pilgrims, jist ter see ther fun; ef they don't pour red-hot shot on him with thar tongues, then I are a howlin' liar."

"Oh, I'll git through with 'em; wish some o' you fellows would go 'long jist ter see ther 'musement."

"Why, Ben, thar isn't a feller in town, 'ceptin' ther parson who runs ther Gospil works up yonder in ther settlement, as would ride 'long with thet gang o' petticoats."

"Some o' ther fellers was goin' over fer ther run this trip, but they passed when they seen what ther ole hearse were ter carry."

"Don't blame 'em, Pete Purdy; I don't, one bit, fer thar is seven shes ter go, an' thar's only coffins inside ter hold nine crowded."

"As 'tis, thar will be three front, three back, and one poor unfort'nit critter as will sit on ther middle seat fer t'others ter play ball with; but I'm guessin' I'll ask thet smart young gal ter ride up with me." And walking boldly up to the door, Ben Trotter made a scrape, a bow, and a motion with his hand, and said, addressing the young and pretty girl referred to:

"Come, miss, seein' as t'others is mostly old in years, an' yer might feel lonesome, I'm makin' brave ter ask yer ter take a seat on ther box, whar yer kin see God's beautiful kentry an' heur me chin as we go 'long."

"With pleasure, sir," replied the young girl, while the others seemed to scowl at the preference showed her.

But Ben raised the pretty woman lightly to the box, sprung up himself, and, with a smile

of triumph at his envious and admiring friends, seized the reins.

The stable boys sprung back from the heads of the six splendid bays, the whip cracked, and the overland coach started on its second run on the branch road to Rocky Glen.

In high glee, at the delightful companion he had by his side, Ben Trotter drove gayly along, changed his horses at the stations, which he reached ahead of time, for he was "showing off" on the road for the benefit of the pretty woman, and, at the dinner halting-place he escorted his fair charge into the dining-room and helped her most bountifully, paying the score himself.

Once more on the way Ben even increased his pace, until it would have been evident, had there been any male passengers along who understood stage-driving, that he was driving more rapidly than was usual, from some other motive than to please a pretty girl on the box at his side.

The truth was, the time for arrivals and departures of stages along the Overland, had been changed, and it brought Ben's leaving time some two hours late, and would consequently get him about dark into the dangerous locality of the Boy Bandit, if he did not make his team step along lively.

And so lively did he make his splendid horses throw the miles behind them, that Ben saw, to his joy, that he would, if not detained, reach Rocky Glen by sunset.

"Next time they can take their time; but this heur pretty gal sha'n't have no skeer ef I kin help it," muttered Ben to himself, and seeing that he now had ample time for his purpose, he drew his team to a walk as they came near a rise.

But, as he did so, out from the thicket on each side of the road dashed seven mounted men and startling was the command:

"Halt! Up with your hands, Ben Trotter, or you die!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

WOLVES IN LAMBS' CLOTHING.

BEN TROTTER'S first impulse, when sternly ordered to halt and throw up his hands, with death the alternative if he did not obey, was to fight, if only to show his fair companion that "he were clean grit clean through," as he would have expressed it.

But a second glance showed him the madness of such an attempt, and he called out lustily:

"I isn't dyin' jist yit, gents, so up goes my hooks."

Suiting the action to the word, he held his hands, still grasping the reins, high above his head, having put on the breaks and brought his horses to a sudden halt.

"Wall, Ben, what have you along this trip, and who are your passengers?" asked a heavily bearded horseman riding forward, while, some distance off, standing by the side of his snow-white horse, Ben saw Gold Plume the Boy Bandit, watching his men do their lawless work.

"I has no metal, I kin sw'ar, an' ef yer kin git any lucre an' dimints out o' thet party in ther interer o' this hearse you is welcome."

"We'll see, Ben; first let me ask this lady by your side if she has any valuables?" said the bandit, at the same time keeping his revolver leveled at the driver, while his half-dozen followers held their weapons upon the coach windows to silence any defense, should any be attempted.

"Say, pard, be a man, ef yer don't look it, an' rob ther ole hens inside, ef jist ter hear 'em cackle," said Ben, with fun in his eye, in spite of the situation he found himself in.

"I'll take the male pilgrims fust, Ben," remarked the bewhiskered robber.

"Yer'll not find 'em in this heur go-cart then, for I drives only petticoats on this trip."

"What, no men along?"

"Nary pantaloon."

"That is too bad, for we expected a rich haul."

"Yer is doomed to disapp'intment, pard outlaw; but hurry up with yer dirty stealin' for I wants ter be on my way."

"All right, I won't detain you long, Ben, if you have no gold-bugs along," and he called out in a loud tone: "Good-afternoon ladies; I must beg of you all a little loan."

"Rob the saucy-faced minx on the box, for she has money, while we are poor as church mice," cried a squeaky voice from within the coach, and then in stern tones from the Boy Bandit was heard:

"Come, come, Danton, do not delay longer."

"All right, captain; but it's a batch of petticoats we've caught," replied the lieutenant, touching his sombrero, and then looking up to the girl on the box, he continued:

"They say, miss, you carry the lucre, so I must beg you to produce it."

"Here it is, the metal I carry, sir!"

With the word the hand came from beneath the folds of the shawl and was thrust forward, while a flash and report followed, and the robber dropped dead from his steed, while instantly upon it came other sharp cracks and three other of the bandits went down.

Then, out of the stage bounded six forms, clad in feminine attire, but the loud voices and actions told plainly that they were men, wolves in lambs' clothing, and in dismay the remaining bandits took to flight though another fell from his horse ere he got out of range and to the utter astonishment of Ben Trotter, his companion on the box stood up and opened fire upon Gold Plume the Boy Bandit, yet to no purpose it seemed, as that daring young leader, seeing that his men had caught a Tartar, quickly sprung upon his white steed and sped away like the wind, in spite of the bullets rattling after him.

Then, back on the seat sunk the supposed young girl, and from her lips broke a ringing laugh and the words:

"Ben! Ben! if the bandits had not attacked us, you would have asked me to marry you before we got to Rocky Glen."

"Little Grit, dog-gone your ugly pictur'—"

"Hold on, Ben, you have been saying I was a beauty all along the road."

"Little Grit, consarn yer, I b'lieves yer is a gal anyway, fer yer did play it on me fine; but I gives in, ef yer tells me who them petticoats is hidin' thar?" and Ben pointed to the other supposed women.

"Oh, they are all friends of yours, Ben, boys from the Pony Stables, whom I got to join me in this little game to trap the Gold Plume; but his usual luck saved him, for he stood off yonder, almost out of range, while his men did the robbing."

"But, let us bury these bodies and hurry on."

"Bury nothin', Leetle Grit; ef you all has fooled me, an' I admits yer has, an' I'll treat all round fer every bandit slewed, why I is ter hev my revenge off ther gerloots up at ther Glen, so toss the stiff on top o' ther hearse, yer durned petticoat rangers, an' we'll hev a leetle mite o' fun with ther boys, from the jedge down."

With loud laughter the supposed women obeyed, and the stage-coach rolled on once more, and arrived in safety at Rocky Glen, when Ben Trotter had his fun out of the boys, for one and all of them took Little Grit and his companions for "shemale pilgrims" as they termed them, and the young officer and ex-Pony Rider came in for loud praise for his clever trick to entrap the Gold Plume.

But his heart soon lost its light-heartedness when told that Bessie Benton was missing, and the traces showed that she had been carried off on horseback.

CHAPTER XXV.

A FATEFUL MEETING.

When Gold Plume, the Boy Bandit, stood apart from his men, at the second robbery of the stage-coach, it was on account of his moody feelings seeming to prompt him to avoid the

excitement and leave the work to his comrades.

Almost regardless of what was transpiring, he stood by the side of his horse, until suddenly brought to consciousness of what was taking place by the shot that killed his lieutenant.

Then intuitively he knew that a trap had been set for him, and seeing that his men were already worsted, and that resistance was useless, he threw himself across the back of his splendid steed, and dashed away from the scene, while the remainder of the band sought refuge in the thicket near by.

Unhurt by the shots sent after him, Gold Plume swept on, at the full speed of his horse, until he turned into a path, the regular Pony Rider's trail, but which was not passable for the coaches.

Hardly had he gone a hundred yards along this, when, suddenly rounding the spur of a rocky hill, he came unexpectedly upon a horseman coming toward him.

It was Buffalo Bill, the Pony Express Rider, mounted on a splendid, jet-black steed, going at full speed, as was also the horse of Gold Plume.

Both horsemen saw their danger and tried to halt suddenly, and the hard bit of the bandit drew his animal up into the air, until he stood almost perpendicular, pawing wildly.

Instantly, with a word from his master—the brideless black also arose on his hind feet, and the fore hoofs of the two animals met, and seemed locked together, while Buffalo Bill, leaning far forward, revolver in hand, leveled it in the face of the Boy Bandit, and said sternly:

"You are my prisoner, Gold Plume!"

It was a magnificent picture, for the instant the two horses stood poised there, and the riders, one with his weapon leveled, the other but half drawn, faced each other.

"I submit," was the sullen reply of Gold Plume, and, as the two horses dropped upon all fours once more, Buffalo Bill urged his black forward and said:

"I will take your weapons, please."

Silently they were given up, and then came, in a tone that seemed so different from Gold Plume's usual manner that Buffalo Bill was astounded:

"What will you do with me?"

"First, take you to Rocky Glen."

"And then?"

"Hang you, doubtless, as you deserve," was the curt reply.

Gold Plume turned livid for an instant, but said, as he looked into the daring, handsome face of the Pony Rider:

"You are Buffalo Bill, I believe?"

"Yes."

"You are the friend of Little Grit?"

"Yes."

"I was going to seek him."

"Yes, you have sought him for a long time."

"No, I have never sought to take his life; but you misunderstand me, I was not going to seek him in anger, but in kindness."

"Ah!"

"I know you will not believe me; but I left my stronghold at daylight to attack Ben Trotter's coach, for I was forced to do so; but we were caught in a trap, and I escaped, and ran upon you; but if you wish to serve Little Grit I can aid you."

"How?"

"You know that Bessie Benton has disappeared."

"Yes."

"I captured her."

"Why?"

"To save her father."

"Bah! he is dead."

"He is not; I did not hang him, though the chief thought I did, and ordered me to do so."

"The chief?"

"Yes."

"Are you not the Boy Bandit?"

"Yes, so-called."

"Chief of the Mountain League?"

"No."

"You are Gold Plume?"

"So-called."

"He is chief."

"No, he is supposed to be, but we have another chief, and I am simply his lieutenant."

"Ah! and who is this man?"

"I will tell you, and more, I will place him in your power, if you agree to my terms."

"Name them."

"First let me tell you that Bessie Benton is this man's prisoner, and I know he intends to force her to marry him; the miner whom you call Trumps—"

"Ned Ross?"

"Yes, he is a prisoner too, and is to die by starvation; then, in a secret cave, I have Dan Benton hidden away; all these will I give into your hands, and the chief too, if you will accept my terms."

"You will prove traitor and betray your chief and his band?"

"Not the band; they have not wronged me; if you wish to capture them you must lead soldiers against them openly; but the chief I will betray, and give you up the three prisoners I have named."

"So be it; I grant your terms, so name them."

"That you will not betray me, no matter when, or under what circumstances you see me, and I am to go free as soon as the chief and the prisoners are in your power."

"All right; but when will you do this?"

"Now, to-night, if you will follow me."

"To be led into a trap."

"I pledge you, no."

"What guarantee have I?"

"That I act from revenge," said Gold Plume with savage intensity.

"Ah! he has wronged you then, this chief?"

"Yes, bitterly, and has already given orders to put me out of the way."

"What motive has he?"

"He loves another—ha! you have my secret, for I am a woman."

Buffalo Bill started and said earnestly:

"I will trust you; lead on! if the Express never gets in I will follow."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CHIEF.

IN a mountain cabin, built of stout logs, and set in under the base of a cliff, sat a man already known to the reader, for it is the Kid Glove Gambler of Rocky Glen.

He is dressed in riding trim, and bears the appearance of one who has ridden hard, for he is bespattered with mud, and his eyes have a tired look.

"Curse the woman! where is she?" he impatiently exclaimed, as he rose from a rude seat and paced the floor.

"She has no right to keep me waiting this way, for I told her when I should come."

"Well, this is our last meeting, and—"

The door opened and broke off his speech.

It was Gold Plume that entered, and the man said:

"Well, Clotilde, you have come at last; you know I dare not be long away at this time, for already I believe the miners suspect me."

"I came as soon as I could; the attack on the coach cost me four men, for we caught Tartars."

"Curse them! this is thinning the band out; but where have you concealed the girl?" he said angrily.

"In the Panther's Cave; do you wish to see her?"

"Yes; you remain here," and the Kid Glove Sport started for the door, but suddenly started back, for a pistol was shoved in his face and a stern voice said:

"You are my prisoner, Gambler Grey."

The man glared like a wounded tiger at bay, but Buffalo Bill's hand held the revolver, and well he knew that the slightest move would be the signal for his death.

"Take his weapons!" said the Pony Rider, and in obedience Gold Plume, or, as she is now known Clotilde stepped forward and obeyed.

"Traitor! I owe this to you!" he hissed.

"Yes; and also that your brother is not dead," she replied, with a look of triumph.

"What?"

"True; I have kept him hidden from you, and he will recognize you, if not by your face, by the red birth-mark of a gallows you have on your hand, and which your kid gloves have so long hidden."

"Clotilde, I am not one to give up life while hope lasts, and if I hang not, you shall die by that same gallows marked hand," he hissed.

"Yes, as you killed poor Ella Roy, who sought you under the disguise of a boy; you see I know you, Grey Benton."

"As I do too, sir, for I charge you with the murder of the poor Chinese, as well as the maiden; ay, and shall denounce you as the chief of the road-agents," said Buffalo Bill, as he bound and gagged the Kid Glove Sport securely.

"Come, let us seek the others," said the woman, and she led the way up the mountain, and ere long halted at a cave, before which stood a guard.

"Brace, go down in the valley and saddle three horses, putting my side-saddle on one," ordered the woman, and with a salute the man obeyed, and Buffalo Bill, holding fast to his prisoner, followed her into the cave, where a lantern was burning dimly.

"Miss Benton, I have come to keep my pledge: your father, yourself and your friend are free," said the strange woman, and the Kid Glove Sport groaned with rage, as out of the darkness came three persons.

And those three were Bessie Benton, her father, and Trumps.

"Hold! you have no time for greetings, and congratulations, for the band is not far away; follow me," said the woman, cutting off the words of Bessie and Trumps, at recognizing Buffalo Bill.

Silently they followed her, Trumps forcing the Kid Glove Sport to keep up, and in five minutes more they were at the corral at the base of the hill, where the guard awaited with three horses.

"Here, Miss Benton, are horses for you, your father and the miner; the Pony Rider's animal awaits him not far away, with my own steed for this prisoner."

"Grey Benton, we will meet again; Buffalo Bill, we part, now; farewell."

Silently she glided away, and disappeared in the darkness, while Brace, the guard, said quickly:

"It looks ter me as ef thar was a storm brewin', so I'd better light out, for I doesn't understand things."

"Hold! if you wish a snug little sum in gold, go with us, and return and show us how to strike a death-blow at this stronghold," said Buffalo Bill.

"Durned ef I don't ef yer talks metal, fer ther chief are tied, I see, an' ther Gold Plume hev scooted, so I turns honest, so here goes," and taking another horse from the corral he mounted, and the party set off at a rapid pace on the trail to Rocky Glen, where they arrived before dawn, to find the miners, headed by Little Grit, or rather Lieutenant Lamdell, about to set out to attempt the rescue of pretty Bessie Benton.

CONCLUSION.

The joy of all at the return of Bessie and her father, not to speak of Trumps, and the hurrahs at the gallant deed of Buffalo Bill, the Pony Rider, in rescuing them, and capturing the chief of the bandits, it would be impossible to describe.

But Rocky Glen was certainly mad with excitement and delight for the day, and it was increased when the morning following Lieutenant Little Grit, as the boys would call him, returned from a successful raid against the bandits, destroying their stronghold, and dispersing those that were not killed.

Of the meeting of this gallant youth with his mother, and his union with Bessie Benton, I can

only say that the heart of Mrs. Lamdell once more knew joy, and at the wedding, in Judge Hunter's tavern, Buffalo Bill was his friend's best man, and stood up with Helen Hewlett as bridemaid, while in honor of the occasion all Rocky Glen got on a spree.

Another grand event in that border town was the execution on the gallows of Grey Benton, the Kid Glove Gambler, in punishment for his many crimes.

His brother, whom he had so wronged, with Little Grit and his wife and mother, had already departed for the East there to live, so were saved the painful sight; but there was one who witnessed the death of the wicked gambler whom only one person present seemed to know.

That one was Buffalo Bill, and he alone knew the fascination in the death scene for the deeply veiled woman who gazed upon the doomed man without a shudder, and to him she whispered when all was over:

"He wronged me deeply, for he made me the guilty thing I am; but in the future I will pass my days in penitence and prayer."

From that day Clotilde, once known as Gold Plume, was never seen in Rocky Glen again.

Colonel Hewlett built his new fort, and then resigned from the army, going East, some said on account of the health of his lovely daughter, whom rumor said died of consumption.

Of the other characters of my story I know nothing, excepting it be of the hero Buffalo Bill, then Pony Express Rider, but now a man whose fame has spread throughout the world, and with whom I often enjoy chats of Ben Trotter, Trumps, and the other bold spirits of the wild Far West.

THE END.

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